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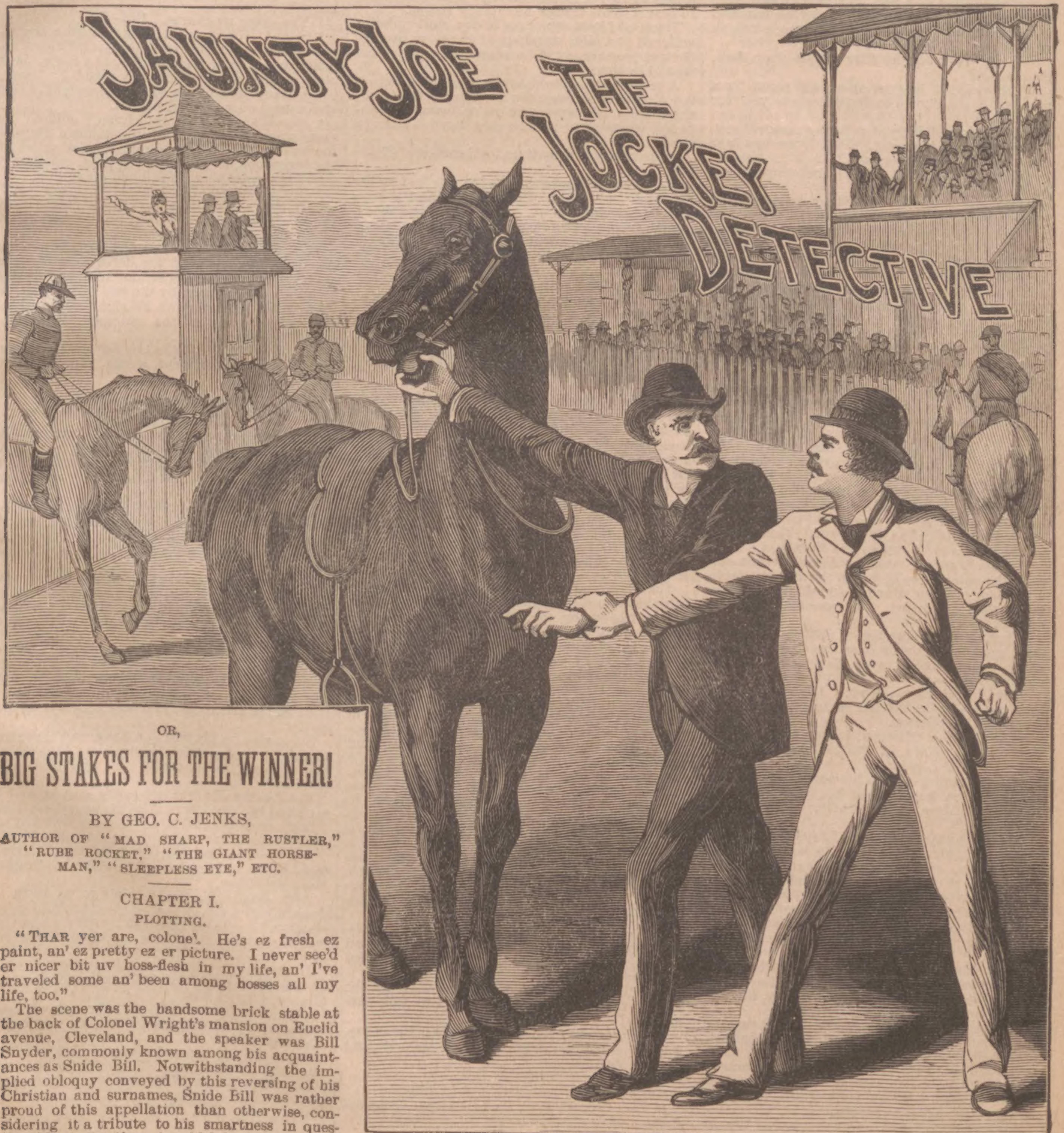
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OR, BIG STAKES FOR THE WINNER!

BY GEO. C. JENKS,
AUTHOR OF "MAD SHARP, THE RUSTLER,"
"RUBE ROCKET," "THE GIANT HORSE-
MAN," "SLEEPLESS EYE," ETC.

CHAPTER I. PLOTING.

"THAR yer are, colone'. He's ez fresh ez paint, an' ez pretty ez er picture. I never see'd er nicer bit uv hoss-flesh in my life, an' I've traveled some an' been among hosses all my life, too."

The scene was the handsome brick stable at the back of Colonel Wright's mansion on Euclid avenue, Cleveland, and the speaker was Bill Snyder, commonly known among his acquaintances as Snide Bill. Notwithstanding the implied obloquy conveyed by this reversing of his Christian and surnames, Snide Bill was rather proud of this appellation than otherwise, considering it a tribute to his smartness in questionable transactions, to which he was anything but a stranger.

A POWERFUL SET OF FINGERS CLOSED UPON THE HAND THAT HELD THE POISONED CAPSULE AND WRENCHED IT AWAY.

Snide Bill was a short, thick-set fellow, bow-legged and round-shouldered. His nose had been broken in a rough-and-tumble fight early in his career, and his neck had a peculiar twist in it, giving him the appearance of always trying to look furtively over his left shoulder. This last deformity was the result of his being half hanged by Vigilantes in Arizona some years before, on suspicion of horse-stealing. He had been pulled up three times and was nearly dead, when, fortunately for him, the real horse-stealer was brought into camp and Snide was saved. He was told to leave that part of the country at once, however, or he might be hanged anyhow, on the supposition that he had been concerned in the appropriation of other horses, although he might be innocent in this particular case. So Snide took their advice and went East forthwith, with his neck out of shape, and his head awry, and had now become head groom for that noted horseman, Colonel Wright, of Cleveland.

Colonel Wright, a distinguished-looking man of fifty-five or so, who had done good work in the late war, and bore the air of a veteran from head to foot, did not reply to Snide Bill's remark for a minute. He was closely examining the tall, rangy black horse, with its small head, neat feet and well-proportioned body, all betokening the thoroughbred, which stood in the roomy, loose stall, looking back with its great liquid dark eyes, as if it thoroughly understood all that was going on around it.

"Yes, Bill," observed the colonel at last, slowly. "I believe he is pretty good. Rising seven and sound as a bell. I think I can give Captain Wood a tussle with him in the fall, and show him that I can get good hunting stock as well as he."

"You'll enter him for ther steeple-chase then, eh, colonel?"

"Certainly, if he goes along all right for a month. I shall have to depend upon you for that, Bill."

"An' yer couldn't trust er better man, colonel, though I do say it myself. This hyer boss is er little out uv condition now—"

"Out of condition? Why?" interrupted the colonel, quickly.

"Oh, nothin' much. On'y ther travelin' from Philadelphia, yer know. It's er long way, an' it don't improve no boss ter take it bouncin' round on the kyars, yer know."

"Well, take care of him, replied Colonel Wright, carelessly, as he strolled out of the stable and went into another, adjoining, where he had four other horses, all representing a great deal of money, but none as valuable as the black beauty in the building by itself, where Snide Bill was to be its constant attendant, leaving all the other animals to the care of his underlings.

These underlings consisted of two persons. One was a colored boy of about eighteen years of age. This was Mose Lloyd. He had had small-pox and his face was deeply pitted. Aside from that he was not bad-looking. The other was a young man of graceful carriage, slightly-built, but well-knit, with curly blonde hair and steel-blue eyes. He had a habit of looking straight into the face of every one to whom he spoke, and if he was not candid in disposition, he certainly looked as if he was. This jaunty young man was known as Joe Morton.

Colonel Wright contented himself with a cursory glance over the horses in the general stable, and then walked slowly across the spacious lawn that separated his mansion from his stables.

"Say, Mistah Mawton, I b'lieve de kurnel done gone cl'ar crazy over dat 'ar colt in de other compahment, over dar," observed the colored boy.

"Oh, I don't know, Mose. It's a good horse, and naturally the colonel is interested in it," answered Joe Morton.

"Say, Mistah Mawton, I done b'lieve I see'd that 'ar hoss afore, in Philadelphia. Ain't his name Flash o' Light?"

"Yes, I believe that is his name."

"Ah! Den he's a good 'un, sure as you're bohn," said Mose, complacently. "I know 'um like a book."

Joseph Morton and Moses Lloyd busied themselves in their work about the horses, rubbing them down, seeing that they had the proper allowance of feed and water, and performing the thousand-and-one little offices that must be as carefully carried out in a well-appointed stable as in the sick-room of a millionaire with everything at his command that wealth can procure.

It got dark in due time, and Joe Morton lighted a gas-jet, inclosed in a wire cage, that threw a glare over everything in its vicinity, but left the further end of stable in gloom.

"We shall be through pretty soon, I suppose, Mose, but there is no use working in the dark, is there?" observed Joe, cheerily.

"Not a bit of it, Mistah Mawton. I dunno as I like the dark very much, an' it's goin to thunder an' lighten, sure as youah bohn," answered Mose, rather apprehensively.

Joe had walked to the extreme end of the stable while speaking, and now entered an empty stall in a corner, out of sight of his companion.

A brick wall divided the larger stable from the smaller, and against this wall the young man was now leaning, as he passed his hand gently over a certain spot in the darkest corner of the stall.

A small block of wood, wedged in between two bricks that had been partly cut away, revealed itself to his touch. The next minute he had pulled the small block of wood noiselessly from its place and applied his eye to the opening thus made, which gave him a full view of the loose stall in which Snide Bill was attending to the wants of the thoroughbred steeple-chaser, Flash o' Light.

"Oho! I thought so," muttered the young man, after a moment's glance through his spy-hole.

He looked around him to see what Mose was doing, and observing that that sable young man was polishing away at the silver-plated harness and whistling softly the while in perfect contentment, he went back to his hole in the wall and resumed his contemplation of the adjoining stable.

The thunderstorm that Mose had predicted was beginning. Already a few big drops of rain were falling; the wind was howling in fierce gusts across the lawn, bending the maples and sycamores, and driving leaves from the sumachs in torrents, while the muttering roll of thunder over the lake told that the storm was coming from the west, and would soon break upon the scene in an abandonment of fury.

Snide Bill stepped to the door of the stable and looked out into the darkness. He had lighted a gas-jet in the place, but had turned it down so that it made things only dimly visible.

Flash o' Light, standing in his stall quietly, watched the man standing at the door in a reflective manner, as if he wondered what game he had in hand.

A low whistle echoed across the lawn, sounding distinctly through the moaning of the wind, the rustling of leaves, and the pattering of rain-drops, which were now coming down in a sharp shower.

"Thar they are, by thunder!" muttered Snide Bill.

He left the doorway, paying no heed to the rain that soaked him through and through almost instantaneously, as he ran diagonally across the lawn to a huge wooden gate in a high wall that surrounded the entire property of Colonel Wright at the back of his mansion. The colonel was accustomed to keeping many thousands of dollars' worth of horseflesh in his stables, and naturally took some precautions against thieves.

The gate was secured with a great iron bar that was padlocked in place with a Yale lock that had two keys. Snide Bill was intrusted with one, and Colonel Wright himself kept the other.

Noiselessly the head groom turned his key in the lock, and swung the iron bar out of its sockets. As he did so the peculiar twist in his neck already referred to gave him as sneaking an air as it was possible for a man to possess. Of course it was a deformity over which he had no control, but it was unfortunate for him that his personal appearance was so decidedly unprepossessing.

"Well, Snide, how goes it?" whispered a hoarse voice, as the gate was opened just wide enough to admit two small, active-looking fellows.

The first, who was the speaker, had that soft-stepping, mock-humble way that comes naturally to the young men who know the Bowery from beginning to end, and occasionally put on the gloves in some of the shady resorts in that favored locality. His real name no one knew, but his associates called him "Kid, the Skipper."

He was a light-weight pugilist, and he had acquired his cognomen by his peculiar tactics in the ring, where he generally tired out his opponents by skipping about on his toes, and planting a blow now and then, whenever he saw a chance of getting away without a return.

The other man, who rejoiced in the possession of a bullet-head, covered with a growth of short, stiff-red hair, and a round, red face, was evidently a cockney sport, as was proven when he directed Snide Bill to "Old 'ard!" when the latter was about to shut the gate rather too hastily. He was not unknown to pugilistic fame as "Wilk, the Tough," though tradition said that he had been christened plain "Wilkins Smith."

"Come in, Kid. Quietly, now, Wilk," whispered Bill, as, after fastening the gate, he led his two companions into the stable, and pulled the door partly shut.

The three men stepped into the stall by the side of the black horse, and began to talk earnestly.

"You are sure you kin git us into the house, Snide?" asked Kid, with his soft voice matching his soft step.

"Sure," answered Snide Bill.

"It's a em'rald, ain't it?" put in Wilk.

"Yes. Worth somewhar 'bout ten thousand dollars. It's a dandy, I tell yer, fellers."

Kid smacked his lips involuntarily.

"Gosh!" he muttered, in a sort of ecstasy

"Are we goin' to git it to-night? I want to git me bloomin' hooks enter summat of that theer kind," said Wilk.

"No. It won't do ter-night; but I'll put up ther job, and fix it fer ye within er week, I guess," replied Snide Bill, as his neck seemed to twist a little more. "Now 'bout this other swag. We want ter divide thet ez soon ez we kin. I've got somethin' else on hand hyar 'bout this hyar boss."

"Well, ain't yer goin' ter let us in on it?" questioned the Skipper, sharply, as he patted Flash o' Light in the soothing way only possible to a man used to horses.

"I dunno. I wuz er-thinkin' uv doin' it by myself. What's that?"

The last two words were uttered sharply, as his head twisted a little more toward his left shoulder.

"Ther wind and rain, uv course," he added. "I'm ez narvous ez er gal."

"Say, Snide!"

It was Kid that spoke.

"Wal?"

"You think you've kept that job about Flash o' Light secret, don't yer? Well, I tell yer I know all about it. I know how much you are to get for gittin' the hoss into the steeple-chase, and how much you will be paid if you kin manage to—"

"Hush!" whispered Snide Bill, putting his hand over the other's mouth. "Don't talk so much!"

"Oh, all right, Snide. I don't want ter talk as I knows on. But are yer goin' ter let me an' Wilk in on the deal? That's what I want to know."

"Yes—yes; uv course. But—"

"Golly! What am dat?" exclaimed a frightened voice at this juncture, bringing Snide's remarks to a sudden termination, as a huge black body came down from the loft over their heads, in company with about a hundred-weight of hay and a mass of splintered boards.

"It's—it's on'y me, gen'elmen," added the same voice, as the light of the lantern showed the scared face of Mose Lloyd in the midst of the three men, as he sat on the floor, unhurt except for the shaking his fall had given him.

"Curse you, you fool nigger! I'll kill yer!" yelled Snide Bill in a fury, as he picked up a heavy shovel from the floor and seemed about to put his threat into execution.

But before he could bring the terrible weapon down on the head of the defenseless Mose, a strong arm was thrown around him, and he was twisted upon his back by the side of the boy, as Jaunty Joe Morton, with his right hand still on the twisted neck of the astonished Snide, observed quietly:

"You wouldn't kill the boy for nearly breaking his neck by accident, would you, Mr. Snyder?"

CHAPTER II.

A PRECIOUS TRIO.

THE appearance of Mose, and then of Joe Morton, had been so sudden and unexpected, that for a moment the Skipper and the Tough were too surprised to interfere in any way, even if they had had time to do so.

They had come to Colonel Wright's stable at nine o'clock on this July evening at the invitation of their pal, Snide Bill, and had taken it for granted that the coast would be kept clear by the latter.

Now, here were colored boys dropping upon them from the loft, Bill trying to commit murder, and a young man turning up at the critical moment to knock him down with a grapevine twist on his ankles.

Kid and Wilk were boxers, however, and accustomed to prompt physical action. They got over their astonishment in an instant, and throwing themselves upon Joe, pulled him away from Snide and threw him into a corner of the stable.

Snide was on his feet in a flash, and throwing himself upon Joe, tried to seize him by the throat and choke him to death. He was livid with passion.

But Jaunty Joe was not easily choked, and it required but one effort upon his part to send Bill flying across the stable, so that he brought up against the brick wall with considerable force.

"Wh—uh—what are yer doin' hyer?" spluttered Snide, as he recovered himself and dragged Mose to his feet.

"Oh, Mistah Snyder, I didn't go to do it. I done fell off'n the loft an'—an'—that's all I know about it," answered Mose, in terrified tones. He was so confused that he was not sure whether he had committed a crime or not.

Joe Morton brought the controversy to a close by seizing the boy by the arm, and drawing him away from Snide.

"Come on, Mose! We ain't through with our horses yet," he said, as he led the way to the other stable.

Snide Bill did not make any remark until the two had disappeared. Then he turned and looked from Kid to Wilk and back again, as if inviting their opinion.

"Bill," said Kid.

"Wal."

"It's er plant, I'm er-thinkin'."

"Yer do?"

"I do."

"So do I."

"Eh?" put in Wilk the Tough. "'Ow d'ye mean?"

Wilk was rather slower of perception than his two companions, but it was his boast that when he did get a thing into his head it stayed there.

Kid the Skipper stepped over to Wilk on the tips of his toes, and looking scornfully into his face said:

"See hyar, Wilk. Don't yer know nothin'? We are a-goin' ter keep our eyes on this fellow, Morton. We fancy he's a sneak, that he'll give us away. Now, d'ye see through it?"

"Ay. I see through it. I'll punch 'is bloom-in' mug if I catches him at it."

"Don't do it till ye'r told," commanded Kid.

"All right."

During the dialogue between Kid and Wilk, Snide Bill had slipped out of the stable and had made his way in the darkness to the doorway of the other stable, whither Joe Morton had led Mose, the colored boy.

A shambling sort of walk had Bill, as his bow-legs described half-circles in his locomotion, while his twisted neck caused him to look sideways in the doubtful way already referred to several times, so that altogether he was anything but a prepossessing object as he sneaked along the wall.

The door of the big stable was slightly ajar, and peeping through the space, he saw that Joe was giving some water in a pail to one of the horses, while Mose was making up a bed of straw for another with a pitchfork. Neither showed in any way that they were disturbed by the rather exciting experience through which they had just passed.

"Wonder if they haven't got cooled down too quick ter be quite nat'ral?" muttered Snide, with a cunning leer. "Seems ter me they air too almighty quiet after ther racket they bed er minute ago. It's all right, p'raps, but I'll watch yer all ther same, Mr. Morton. As fer ther nigger, he on'y does ez he's told. I don't take no 'count uv him."

With these sage reflections, Snide Bill moved back to his own apartment, where Kid and Wilk were keeping the black horse company and wondering what would be the end of their evening's adventures.

"Wal?" demanded the Skipper, inquiringly.

"He's all right for the present," answered Snide. "But I don't know why he wuz er-sneakin' 'round hyar. The colonel sez he hez hed him on'y since ther day I came, but he hez ev'ry faith in him."

"I think 'e's a bloomin' chump," put in Wilk.

The three worthies here changed the subject, as being of no further importance, Snide having first secured the door leading to the lawn, as well as between the two lofts overhead by means of which Mose had come from one stable to the other and met with the disastrous tumble described in the last chapter.

Had they known that Joe Morton, at his place of espial at the brick wall dividing the stables, was watching and listening to every movement and word, they would hardly have felt so comfortable.

"Now, boys, 'bout this hyar swag. It's hid down by ther lake-shore in er little place ez I hev, an' I dunno but thet this hyar kind uv er night is er good one ter go down an' get it."

As if to emphasize Bill's words, the thunder that had been pealing continuously since the first breaking out of the storm, here crashed furiously, as if it would tear heaven and earth apart, while the vivid blue flashes of forked lightning forced their way through the cracks around the door and closely-shuttered windows, and lighted up the stable with what might have been an infernal illumination.

"All right. Let us go now, without no more bloomin' cackle. Blow me if I wouldn't 'ave done all this 'ere business long ago if it 'ad been left to me. Why, when I was in Lannon, I—"

"Oh, give us a rest on Lannon!" interrupted the Skipper. "If you had everything so sweet there, why didn't you stay there?"

"Well, I'm blowed if I ain't goin' back as soon as I get a fight out of some of them bloom-in' light-weight chumps in this country as thinks they can fight, don't you know," replied Wilk the Tough, significantly.

"What light-weight chumps do you mean?"

"You, for one," was the defiant retort.

"Wal, now, you kin make a match with me for anything you like right here. I'll fight you with gloves or bare knuckles, for the gate money, the whole or part, for stakes or for fun. I'll—I'll—"

The Skipper was so indignant that he could not go on, and Snide Bill, who had no patience with professional pugilism, interposed with a gruff reminder that they were not there to get up prize-fights, but to attend to more important business.

"You see this hyar hoss?" he went on.

"Blowed if the bloomin' h'animal ain't big enough for a blind man to see," remarked Wilk.

"I'm goin' ter be in charge uv him from now on ter the time he starts in thet thar steeple-chase."

"Yes."

"Ther colonel will hev him entered for thet thar steeple-chase in less than er week."

"A week?"

"Yes, er week. He said ez he'd want ter see how he went along for the next month, but he'd trust ter me—"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

The Tough laughed in three hoarse monosyllables, and Kid, having glanced at him indignantly, as if he would like to test their respective pugilistic abilities there and then, Snide went on:

"I'll hev ther hoss sich er sure winner in two days thet ther colonel will be anxious ter hev him entered fer ther race, and won't want ter lose no time, fer fear he won't be able ter git him in at all."

With his broken nose turned rather more than usual toward his left shoulder, and an expression of low cunning even in the curve of his bow-legs and the arch of his round shoulders, Snide Bill emitted a chuckle of intense enjoyment.

Wilk repeated his hoarse "Haw, haw, haw!" and again the Skipper clinched his fists, and in pantomime expressed his desire to have a round with the Cockney according to the rules of the London prize ring, then and there.

"Now, it will be worth at least \$5,000 to engineer this hyar race right, you understand?"

The two listeners nodded significantly.

"Wal, thet's all."

"Yes, that's all," acquiesced Kid.

"Yes, that's all at present," added Joe Morton, at his peep-hole in the next stable; "but, perhaps I may have something more to say as time goes on."

"Are we a-goin' ter divide that other stuff to-night, or not?" demanded Wilk. "I'm dead broke, an' I thinks as 'ow when a man 'as done 'is work 'e should git 'is pay. Them's my sentiments, an' I don't care who knows 'em."

Snide Bill did not answer in words, but he looked Flash o' Light carefully over, and, putting a rubber coat over his stable attire, examined a revolver that he carried in his hip-pocket, and motioned to his two companions to go out.

The rain was still descending in torrents, and the thunder and lightning were as furious as ever, but Kid and Wilk were not the men to mind bad weather. They turned up the collars of their sack coats, and went out into the rain as cheerfully as if it had been a perfectly fair night.

As the two men passed through the outer gate, Snide secured it by the bar, and went to another gate in the wall by the side of the horses that was also securely fastened, but of which he had a key, while a large, ferocious bull-mastiff lay in his kennel just inside.

"Halloa, Caesar!" said Snide, soothingly, and the animal, with a wag of his tail, went back into his kennel, from which he had emerged on hearing the groom's footsteps on the gravel path.

Snide Bill had the faculty of making friends with all sorts of animals.

"Bill, where are you going? Is the horse all right?"

It was Colonel Wright's voice, and Snide ground his teeth in irritation. Kid and Wilk were waiting for him at the corner, and now he had to stop and answer questions.

"Oh, yes, he's all right. I hev made him all right fer thet night, an' I hev er little bizness down-town ter 'tend ter now."

"Important?" asked the colonel, as he stepped from the side-door of the house upon the covered porch just inside the gate.

"Rather."

"Well, come in for a moment; I want to speak to you."

Bill obeyed with a rather bad grace, but the colonel did not appear to notice it.

A little hall led into Colonel Wright's library, a handsome apartment, with book-cases on two sides, a large desk on another, and a large, open fireplace, in which a small but bright fire looked very comfortable after the mud and rain outside.

"Sit down, Bill."

Snide obeyed, planting himself on the extreme edge of a chair near the fire, and furtively watching his employer over his left shoulder, as his custom was.

"Bill, what about that Joe Morton? Do you think he is a good man to leave in charge of the other horses?"

Bill hesitated for a moment. He did not like Joe, as we know, but a little consideration was enough to make him decide that it was better to have a man about him who attended strictly to his own business, than a stranger, who might be given to meddling. So he answered, slowly:

"Oh, yes. He'll do."

"Well, mind you keep your eye on Flash o' Light. I have about determined to enter him in that steeple-chase in the fall anyhow."

"Very well, colonel. Anything more?"

"No. I guess not. I—"

A piercing shriek interrupted the colonel's remarks, and prevented the completion of his sentence, and a young girl, in a white dress, with her hair, broken from its fastenings, streaming over her shoulders, burst into the

room and threw herself into his arms, sobbing in an agony of terror.

"Oh, papa, save me! Oh, the men—the two dreadful men!"

"Men, Ada, my dear? What men?"

"Cuss them thar fellows! I bet it's Kid and Wilk!" muttered Snide Bill, under his breath, as he ran to the doorway through which the girl had come and tried to see the cause of her terror.

CHAPTER III.

A CHASE IN THE DARK.

A DOUBLE doorway separated Colonel Wright's library from the dainty room that was devoted to the special use of his daughter Ada. A handsome *portiere* hung inside the latter apartment, between that and the door of the colonel's room being a space about three feet, the idea being that Ada's piano or her chit-chat with feminine friends should not disturb him when he was busy, for Colonel Wright was an authority on horse matters, and he wrote a great deal about them, not only for papers and magazines, but in a long treatise that he intended shortly to publish in book form. He was a rich man, having a large share in a rolling-mill near Cleveland, and being interested in other good-paying enterprises in different parts of the country.

Snide Bill ran into the boudoir, and looked from one of the windows, draped with expensive lace curtains and silken hangings, with the darkness beyond. The windows looked upon the garden, outside the wall that divided it from the lawn and the stables, and gave an uninterrupted view of the avenue beyond.

Snide saw the men scuttling through the iron gateway in front of the avenue, and shook his head.

"Durn them fellers! Just what I 'spected."

"What did you see, Ada?" asked her father, as Snide walked back into the library.

"Two men, papa—two ugly men, with their faces pressed against the glass of the window, watching me as I sat at the table writing."

The colonel waited to hear no more. Seizing a revolver that lay in his open desk, he hastily slipped on a rubber overcoat and a slouch hat, and, beckoning to Snide, made his way by another door to the garden, and thence to the street.

"Come on, Bill," he said, without looking back. "I'll catch those scoundrels before they are half an hour older, or my name is not Robert Wright."

The man who was following him closely did not answer, but Colonel Wright was used to Snide Bill's reticence, and he was not surprised that he did not say anything now.

"They cannot have gone far," he continued, as he broke into a run. "This is a straight street, and we can see them by the flashes of lightning if they try to hide anywhere in the neighborhood."

The rows of shade trees on Euclid avenue make this broad thoroughfare one of the finest in the country on a hot summer afternoon, but in a thunderstorm, with the rain coming down in torrents, it is not quite so enchanting.

So thought the colonel when, after a run of fifteen minutes, without catching the men who had frightened his little girl, and who, he had no doubt, were sneak-thieves or burglars, he stood under a spreading oak tree to get his breath, and give Snide Bill a chance to catch him.

"The rascals!" he panted. "I'll put a bullet into them if they do not surrender. There has been too much of this sort of thing in Cleveland lately. But they shall find that they have tackled the wrong man in Colonel Robert Wright."

Snide Bill appeared to acquiesce, for he nodded, and taking his revolver out of his pocket, showed that he, too, was ready for the fray.

Still, he did not speak. The reader will easily suppose that knowing what he did about the two men who had frightened Ada Wright, he was not likely to give much information about them to his employer, even if he happened to possess it. Altogether, it appeared as if Snide Bill was in rather an awkward predicament.

"I don't care if it takes all night," growled the colonel. "I'll follow them to catch them, and I'll put them into the station-house before I sleep, as sure as we two stand here, and as sure as your name is Bill Snyder."

"Um!" grunted his companion.

The wind howled and whistled through the branches of the oak tree and the rain beat down the broad leaves and descended in a myriad of streams upon the two pursuers as they stood there. But Colonel Wright was too mad to mind getting wet, and as for the man by his side, he appeared to be wrapped in thought, judging by the way he stood doubled up, with his head down, close to the tree-trunk.

Suddenly the colonel, revolver in hand, dashed away from the tree and ran along the stone sidewalk at the top of his speed, his boot-heels clicking with a sharp report at every step.

"I see them!" he howled, in a frenzy of excitement. "Come on, Bill!"

His companion, apparently nothing loth, obeyed.

ed at once, keeping just a few yards behind the colonel, but never losing ground. He evidently stayed in the rear for a purpose, and not because he could not have kept up with his employer.

A person who was acquainted with the short, bandy legs of Snide Bill would have wondered that he could move so swiftly even on such a smooth road as the flagstones of Euclid avenue.

It now settled down to a steady race.

Colonel Wright, an athlete all his life, was at fifty-five years of age the match for many a trained runner of half his time in the world. He had learned to run when a boy, and with elbows to his sides, his hands clinched, the right holding his revolver, he swung his arms, from the elbows to the shoulders, with the rythmical stroke of the driving-bar of a locomotive, giving himself a fresh impetus at every swing. His steps were long and sure, and he breathed with deep and deliberate inspirations, thus "saving his wind," to use a technical expression, and leaving enough go in himself for a spurt, if one should be necessary toward the end of the race.

Colonel Bob Wright had long ago learned that brains tell in foot-racing, as in everything else, and that intelligence is as necessary to the successful runner as the length and strength of limb, and suppleness of joints, that ignorant people think to be almost the only essential qualifications.

The rain beating down in the faces of the colonel and his companion was dead against them. The wind had risen since the beginning of the storm, and seemed to be pushing them back with a vindictiveness that might have been human.

Colonel Bob's blood was up, however, and he disregarded all obstacles. It would take more than a gust of wind and a torrent of rain to turn him back now. He hardly noticed the elements at all, although his waterproof coat had opened a little over his chest, and the rain was beating in upon his light overcoat, so that for the space of a few inches it was wet through.

Since he had first caught sight of the two figures dashing away from behind a clump of trees a few score yards before him, he had had only one thought—to overhaul the rascals that had frightened his daughter, and perhaps arranged to break into the house at some future time.

Colonel Wright had no sympathy with suspicious characters under any circumstances, and he believed in prompt visitation of the law upon men who had been proven to be beyond the pale of the law. When he caught these two fellows who were leading him such a desperate chase, it would go hard with them—a fact of which the flying gentry themselves were doubtless fully aware.

The fugitives had disappeared in the rain and mist, when they broke from their cover under the trees, but the slap-slap of their soft-soled shoes could occasionally be distinguished during a lull in the howling of the wind, or when it swerved for a second so as to drive sounds in the direction of the colonel. The men were evidently professional thieves, thought Wright, for their shoes were of the kind that the sneaking members of the dishonest profession generally used on their secret depredations.

The lightning, though it had not ceased altogether, was not so vivid and frequent as it had been ten or fifteen minutes before. Though the colonel hoped, by its light, to be able to make out the fugitives, he was disappointed. They managed to keep some of the ponderous shade trees between them and their pursuers continuously, and the only guide the colonel had was the sound of their feet.

"Confound those fellows!" he muttered. "I never saw anything like it in all my life. They keep on with that steady dog-trot of theirs, and are always just so far ahead, in spite of all we can do."

The colonel put on a spurt as he said this, his companion keeping close behind him, apparently with no difficulty. Truly, Snide Bill's bow-legs must have had a perfect well-spring of youthful agility concealed in them.

"Ah! we are gaining on them!" growled the colonel. "Their footsteps are sounding plainer!"

In truth, it was as he said. The slap-slap could be discerned now without intermission, and as a feeble glimmer of lightning—the final efforts of the thunderstorm—lighted up the wet, shining flagstones, the two men that had led them such a long and desperate chase, could be seen scudding along close to the garden railings of the mansions that stood well back from the street in all their stately magnificence.

"Hold on there!" bawled the colonel, as his boot-heels clicked more rapidly on the flagstones.

The two men took no heed of the command, but ran steadily on, with their heads down to meet the rain and wind with as little damage as possible.

"Hold on, I tell you, or I'll blow you both to perdition!" yelled Colonel Wright, again, as he waved the pistol that he had carried in his hand throughout the race.

Still no answer nor any sign that they heard him.

Frantic with rage, and breathless from his exertions, the irascible colonel presented his pistol full at the head of the nearest man, and—pulled the trigger.

A faint click was the result.

The colonel had been carrying the revolver in his hand, with the rain beating on it, for half an hour, and it was wet to its innermost core.

"Curse it!" he howled, as he pulled the trigger again and again.

It was a Smith & Wesson double-action, and as he pulled the trigger the cylinder revolved and the hammer fell with a dull click at each turn. But there was no report! The rain had soaked into the cartridges and had rusted the machinery of the weapon so that the hammer fell gently instead of with the sharp slap necessary to discharge it.

Still the two men in front did not look around. The wind was blowing steadily in the faces of the whole party, and while the colonel and his follower could hear the slap-slap of the fugitives' footsteps, their own feet might have been a mile away for anything that the former could hear of them.

"Stop! Do you hear?" howled the colonel.

No answer.

"Then take that!"

With all his force Colonel Wright hurled his revolver at the head of one of the men. Fortunately for the latter, there was a tremendous gust of wind and rain at that moment, and he ducked his head. The revolver went whirling over him, twisting rapidly as it did so. The result of the twisting was rather painful to the man, for the butt just caught him slightly on the top of his head, administering a smart rap that made his brain spin.

Even now the man did not stop at once. He thought that the wind had dislodged the branch of a tree or part of the roofing of some of the high houses in the vicinity, and he hastily resolved that it would not be wise to remain on the spot very long. So he ran on perhaps some yards further before he realized that he had been struck by a pistol, instead of a tree branch or a roofing slate.

Then he stopped, holding his companion by the arm and looked around, as Colonel Wright, boiling over with fury, sprung upon them both and seized them in an iron grip.

"You rascals! I have you at last!" he gasped, as he tried to regain breath enough to express his full opinion of them, and his intention to put them in jail forthwith.

"Why, Colonel Wright," exclaimed the man who had been hit by the pistol, as the light of a street lamp shone upon the face of Snide Bill's employer.

The same light revealed the features of the man to the colonel, and he dropped the arms he held as if they had been red-hot.

"What in the name of the foul fiend does this mean?" he growled, in amazement.

"I don't know. Why did you throw that heavy revolver at my head? I suppose it was you, although I didn't see you do it."

But the colonel was too astonished to reply. He could only look from one to the other in speechless discomfiture.

Then he turned to his companion.

"Bill, we are mistaken. These two gentlemen are the sons of my old friend, Tom Chester, and we have been chasing them for thieves. Where have you been by the way, and what made you run like that?"

"Run," answered the man who had been hit by the pistol as he showed a handsome aristocratic face to the colonel. "Who wouldn't run on a night like this? Jack and I had been to the ball match. Then we took supper with some of the boys, and ran all the way home, instead of riding, just for fun."

"Queer ideas of fun you boys must have, but I wish you didn't run quite so well. You've played me out."

"Well, colonel, we learned it at the same place you did when you were young—at old Yale. You must lay all the blame on our *alma mater*. Won't you come in and dry your clothes? We are home now."

As he spoke the young man unclosed the great iron gate opening upon a spacious lawn, while a brilliantly-lighted house even handsomer than the colonel's own could be seen in the distance at the other end of the lawn.

"No, thank you, Tom, I must get back; I took you for two fellows that have been trying to break into my house. They may be around there yet, somewhere. Good-night, boys."

The two young men returned the parting salutation and ran up the gravel walk to the house, laughing over their adventure, while the colonel turned to his companion who had stood modestly in the back-ground during the foregoing conversation.

"Come, Bill let us hurry back."

"Certainly, colonel," was the answer. "But, excuse me, my name is not Bill."

"Not Bill—not Snide Bill?" snapped the colonel, in his quick way. "What in thunder is it, then?"

"Joe Morton, your under groom, but better known in police circles as Jaunty Joe, the Jockey Detective."

CHAPTER IV.

SNIDE BILL'S DOUBLE GAME.

WHEN Colonel Wright beckoned to Snide Bill to follow him the latter was too deep in thought to notice the summons. He recognized the fact that the Skipper and the Tough had become impatient of waiting for him in the dark and storm, and had come around to the front of the house, on their own responsibility, to see what was going on.

Where were they now? That was the question. It could not do for them to be caught by the colonel at this juncture. There was too much depending upon them in future.

As will be seen, the head groom in the employ of Colonel Wright had more than one scheme afoot for his own benefit and the corresponding loss of his employer, and in these schemes he depended upon the assistance of Kid the Skipper and Wilk the Tough.

"If ther boss ketches 'em then ther game is gone up fer er while, sure," he reflected, as he looked out into the darkness and managed to distinguish the colonel rushing through the gate in his slouch hat and long rubber overcoat, the latter shining in the reflection of a street lamp, showing that the garment was wet all over already.

He turned from the window, although his twisted neck gave him the appearance of still glancing over the lawn as he stepped toward the center of the boudoir.

He admired the dainty knick-knacks, the rich hangings, the luxurious furniture, the splendid Steinway piano, with its lid inlaid with pearl and solid gold—the evidences on every hand of practically unlimited wealth and cultivated feminine taste. He would have liked to pack up everything in the room and cart it away. But as that was impossible, he contented himself with grinding his teeth and giving his dumpy broken nose a vicious rub of envy. Snide Bill was not the man to rejoice in his neighbor's good fortune in pure goodness of heart.

As his head slowly turned on his twisted neck his glance fell upon an object that caused his small eyes to glisten hopefully and malevolently.

Ada Wright, completely prostrated by fright, sat back in her father's chair at his open desk, her fingers idly toying with a large glass paper-weight.

In her white dress, with the tresses of gold streaming over her shoulder she made a picture such as would drive an artist or a poet into ecstasy.

Snide Bill was neither an artist nor a poet, but he could see that Ada Wright was a beautiful girl. He might have been more deeply impressed with her natural charms had not something else caught his eye and enchained his attention.

In the folds of her white dress, which was made with great bunches of flagee, fluffy lace at the throat, he saw something gleaming like a tremendous green eye, surrounded by flashing white sparks.

"The emerald, by gracious!" he muttered.

"And she's wearing it for a pin."

The girl, with her eyes half-closed, was in a semi-conscious condition. She had a dim idea that some one was in the room, and that she was sitting helpless in her father's chair, but she could not have declared for certain that the some one present was not her father. She had a general misgiving that there was a stranger hovering about, but she could not make her mind distinguish the difference between the round bullet-head that was thrust through the portieres from her boudoir and the leonine face that she knew was her father's.

The fact is, Ada Wright was completely upset by her adventure with the two horrible faces at her window, and she could no more have moved or cried out even had a murderer stood over her with a dagger, than she could have spread wings and flown across Lake Erie.

"My! What a stone! And they say it is good for only \$10,000! Um! Let me git hold on it, an' ef I don't make it pay me twice ez much ez that, my name ain't Snide Bill."

The owner of this pleasing cognomen was gazing at the emerald as if fascinated.

There was some excuse for his admiration. The gem was of immense size for an emerald. It was of that deep, rich, translucent green that can sometimes be seen on an ivy-leaf in a shower. At every movement, as the girl's bosom heaved tumultuously, the green changed in hue like the back of a chameleon, but always preserved the deep verdant tone that was its chief beauty. Surrounding it was a border of diamonds—large, clear stones of that blue-white which lapidaries say is so hard to find in its purity. The diamonds, in contrast with the emerald, made the jewel one that a connoisseur would go wild over for its artistic beauty alone. Snide Bill saw only its immense value.

"It is in er good solid gold setting, too. That's worth something in ther melting-pots. Now, ther next thing is, what am I ter do 'bout it?"

As Snide Bill made this business-like observation to himself, he looked cautiously about the library and then stepped into the room so quietly.

ly that he did not make even a rustle. His foot-falls on the soft carpet were of course entirely noiseless, and he might have been a very ugly ghost gliding about the room if it were not for the rather obtrusive breathing that at times became almost a snore, as Snide Bill became particularly anxious in his observations.

He went to the door leading to the lawn behind the wall that divided the back of the premises from the front, and by which he had entered when Colonel Wright stood upon the porch. The door was securely fastened.

There were three other doors in the library. One led to the main part of the house, at present tenanted only by servants, who, in their distant sitting-room, were entertaining visitors of their own, and took no heed of anything that might be transpiring in the apartments of the colonel and his daughter. There were electric bells all through the house, and it was only necessary to touch a button to bring an attendant to the boudoir or library at once. Until a bell was rung no one thought of going to either of those rooms.

Snide Bill knew the ways of the house, and as he bolted the door on the inside he was satisfied that he had shut off all communication with the rest of Colonel Wright's mansion, for a time at least.

The door through which the colonel had disappeared in his pursuit of the sneak-thieves, and which opened upon a small hall, with another door upon the end of the great porticoed stone veranda along the front of the house, was half open. The outer door was closed and fastened with a spring lock, which could be opened from the outside by a latch-key.

"Guess I'd better shoot a bolt as well," muttered Snide Bill, as he suited the action to the word, and secured the outer door so that no one could break in upon him unawares.

The fourth door was that leading to Ada's boudoir, with the *portieres* inside. Snide Bill went through this doorway into the boudoir and examined the door that he could see across the room.

"Um! Yes! This hyar leads to ther house ag'in, uv course. Wal, I'll fix thet, too."

He shot a small, nickel-plated bolt, and then, as he looked around him in his furtive way, he was satisfied that he had blocked every way by which people outside the two apartments might strive to enter.

The girl had been sitting back in her father's chair, with her eyes nearly closed. Snide Bill had no fear of her interference. She had not been looking at him, although her eyes were turned in his direction occasionally, when he moved into their focus, as it were.

"Durned ef she ain't jist scared ter death," he muttered. "Wal, so much ther better fer me. I'm er goin' ter fool yer this time, Mr. Skipper an' Mr. Wilk, an' don't yer forgit it. It ain't often ez I strikes sich a streak uv luck ez this hyar, an' I'm goin' ter work it now it hez come, ter ther last dollar."

Snide Bill chuckled silently, as he made these observations under his breath, and, with his round shoulders, twisted neck and broken nose, he really was anything but a prepossessing object—though perhaps it was not his own fault, as he could hardly be blamed for his personal defects.

With one last look about him, and with ears strained to catch any sound that might indicate hostile approaches, Snide crept softly toward the girl.

As she lay back in the chair, with her hands resting idly in her lap, the folds of lace in the front of her dress partly covered the magnificent brooch, with its emerald solitaire and fringe of diamonds.

Snide Bill bent over her, and his long, claw like fingers were extended to the jewels, as he watched her face with the intensity of a bird of prey about to swoop down upon a sleeping victim.

Her eyes remained half-closed, and it was evident to the would-be thief that she was unconscious even of his very presence.

With practiced hand, he seized the brooch and tried to loosen the pin.

"Durn that thing, I've jagged my finger! How in thunder is it fixed? S'pose I'll hev ter do it this hyar way."

He drew from an inner pocket a formidable dirk-knife—an implement that was hardly necessary for a peaceful groom in a civilized place like Cleveland—and swung it around in the manner of a man used to it.

What was he about to do?

In his expressionless face, with its broken nose and somewhat bleary eyes nothing could be read of his intention, but if he did not mean murder, his actions gave that impression.

He was getting desperate now. He knew he had but a short time to accomplish his villainous work. The colonel might return at any minute and there was always the possibility of some of the servants breaking in upon him at an inopportune juncture.

Snide Bill thought hastily over these chances and the murderous movements became more pronounced. Holding the emerald finally in his left hand he brought the point of his knife close to the neck of the unconscious Ada.

With a swift movement, he passed the knife around the brooch, cutting a piece of the fair white dress goods and lace away, and bringing the emerald with it.

One hasty glance of admiration and cupidity at the jewel, and he put it in his pocket, out of sight.

The girl never moved. If she knew that Snide Bill had possessed himself of the emerald and diamonds she made no sign. Just as she had dropped into her father's chair when he dashed out of the house in pursuit of Kid the Skipper and Wilk the Tough, so she remained.

"Now ter git out this uv hyar place an' fit it so ez the old man won't hev no idea it's me," muttered Snide.

Although Colonel Wright had no reason to suspect his head groom of being anything but a strictly honest man, Snide Bill had been in the world too long not to be fully aware of the power of circumstantial evidence to send even an innocent person to the penitentiary sometimes.

In a twinkling he had opened the door leading to the back portion of the premises, and making sure that there was nobody lurking about the lawn in the vicinity of the house, he ran through the rain to the stables. A quick turn of his key in the lock of the stable door, and he was standing by the side of Flash o' Light, Colonel Wright's thoroughbred horse, with a reputation for hurdle-jumping that he was expected to justify in a steeple-chase before he was many weeks older.

Snide Bill gave the horse a touch to make him step over to the other side of his stall. Then putting up the straw in one corner, he displaced a loose board under the manger, well out of sight, and disclosed a small hole. In this he deposited the emerald, and then hiding all traces of what he had done, ran quickly back to the house.

Ada still lay back in the chair.

"Good! Now ter fix things so ez ter make myself all right."

He opened the door through which the colonel had run after the two thieves, or what he supposed were thieves. No one was to be seen, which fact gave unspeakable satisfaction to Snide Bill.

"I guess I'll try an' wake her up, an' ask her what scared her. Whar's somethin' thet'll bring her to? It's er kind of faint, I guess."

Fortunately for Snide Bill, who did not know much about the treatment of fainting fits, Ada here gave signs of returning life, and in a minute looked wildly around her and into the grimly sympathetic face of the head groom.

"What's the matter? Where are those two terrible men? Where are they?" she echoed, feebly, as she rose from the chair, but immediately sunk back, exhausted.

"Two men? Thar were two men, eh? What did they do ter yer?"

The girl put her hand to her throat, where the hole cut by Snide Bill allowed the air to reach her chest.

"My brooch—my emerald!" she exclaimed.

"What?"

"It is gone! Oh, what will my father say?"

"Gone? Ah, then thar must hev been someone in ther house. I heerd yer call out an' I'm up from ther stables. See hyar! They must hev gone out this hyar way."

Snide Bill pointed to the door that he had just opened in the front of the house. Then he ran to it as if to look for the supposed depredators.

No sooner had he got outside, on the broad stone porch than he was seized by two pairs of hands, while the hoarse voice of the Skipper hissed in his ear:

"It ain't no use, Snide! We see the hull thing. You hev ther shiner, an' if yer don't divy like er man, we will give yer away ter the gal, right now!"

CHAPTER V.

A GREAT MAN.

LET us shift the scene.

It was the afternoon after the events detailed in the previous chapters.

Snide Bill, bright and chipper, and showing no signs of having passed through any unusual adventures the night before, was standing at the gate of Captain Wood's private track, some few miles from Cleveland, talking to no less a person than the captain himself.

Captain Wood was a stout, good-looking fellow of thirty-five or so, with a heavy mustache and a rubicund face. He was the picture of good temper and health.

The track was oval in shape, and half a mile in length, and was as smooth as a parlor floor. If there was anything under the sun that Captain Wood cared for it was his horses, and he took more care of the track for their benefit than he would of his children, had he possessed any.

At one end of the track was a long, low brick building, containing stable-room for a dozen horses. Two or three boys and men hung about the doors of some of the stables attending to the toilets and comforts of the animals within, while a man of forbidding countenance was driving around the track in a sulky drawn by a

tall, long-legged chestnut horse, whose glaring eyes and ears laid back on his head did not speak very well for his temper.

"So Colonel Wright will enter his Flash o' Light for the steeple-chase in September, will he, Snide?"

"Thet's what."

"Ah! He knows that my roan, Loafer, is already entered, I suppose?"

"I s'pose he does," answered Snide, dryly, "seem' ez thet's ther principal reason he's goin' ter bring out Flash o' Light."

"I'll give Flash o' Light all he wants. Have you seen the Loafer lately, Snide?"

"No. How could I? You allers keeps him too close. Can't fool you, eh, Cap?"

"Not on a horse, Snide. Not on a horse," laughed the captain, as he led the way to the stables.

"Thet's exactly what the colonel says," muttered Snide to himself. "Wal, with Kid and Wilk ter help me, I sh'u'dn't be s'prised ef we wuz ter fool both uv yer. Er feller can't most allers tell 'bout er horse."

"There, what do you think of that, Snide?"

Captain Wright had led out of one of the stables, in which a man lived day and night, and who now followed the horse, blinking into the sunshine, a magnificent horse that promised, from his appearance, to put even Flash o' Light on his mettle, if the latter expected to beat him in a race.

With the eyes of an expert, Snide Bill looked all over the roan, and in a minute told himself that it would have no chance with Flash o' Light, in spite of its magnificent appearance. There were little weaknesses in the legs, a suggestion of failure in wind, and two or three other points that would have been utterly lost upon the ordinary observer, but that Snide saw was unmistakable.

"He's er good hoss, captain," he said, at the end of his scrutiny. "He's er good hoss!"

"What d'ye think about Flash o' Light doing him up?" asked the captain, with more eagerness than he had hitherto betrayed.

Snide Bill's neck seemed to twist a little more, and there was a shade more cunning in his bleary eyes than they usually contained, as he turned his head away and shook it slowly, in a non-committal way.

"Of course, Snide; of course. It wouldn't be quite right for you to talk about your employer's business. Besides, you are taking care of Flash o' Light entirely, are you not?"

"No. I only see it once in er while. I hev'n't no more ter do with it than you hev."

Snide Bill uttered this deliberate lie without hesitation. It was one of the principles of his life never to tell the truth when he could tell a falsehood as well. In this particular case he had a purpose in hiding from Captain Wood his close relation with Colonel Wright's thoroughbred, Flash o' Light.

"I thought you were in special charge of him," said the other.

"No. I'm jist around ther stables thar, but thar's another feller hez everything ter do with Flash—er feller they call Joe Morton. He's not er very squar' man, I'm 'fraid, an' I wouldn't advise yer ter let him come snoopin' 'round this hyar track or stables, ef I wuz you."

"Is he likely to do it?"

"I dunno. I wouldn't trust him."

"I'll break his back with my horsewhip, if he comes around here," answered the captain, as he cracked a blacksnake that he carried with a report that made the gentle Bill jump.

Snide Bill grinned approvingly, and his neck twisted a little more in his admiration of the other's sentiments.

"Take him in, Sam," said Captain Wood to the groom who held Loafer by the bridle.

The man obeyed as quickly as Loafer would let him; but as the noble animal chose to plunge and lash out with his heels for a minute or two first, there was some little delay in taking him indoors.

"He'll kill some one afore he's done," exclaimed Snide Bill. "Durned ef he hezn't lots uv spirits, anyhow."

At this moment the man who had been driving his long-legged horse around the track, drew up and cast an interested glance after Loafer as he disappeared into his stall.

"Hoss in good condition, Cap?" he asked, with a carelessness that was more assumed than real.

"All right," answered Wood, shortly.

"Ah! Thanks for the use of yer track, Cap."

"Quite welcome."

Captain Wood evidently did not care for the man with the big chestnut horse, and though he had allowed him to exercise his animal on his private track, was not disposed to be very confidential with his visitor.

There was a sinister gleam in the latter's black eyes, and his black mustache arose in a sneering smile under his hooked nose, as he touched his horse with the whip and sent him flying through the gates.

"There's mischief in that fellow, I know, though he is always so sweet with me. Do you know much about him, Bill?"

"I know about ez much ez any one else does

about him. He's er man ez knows 'bout hosses pretty well, an' when he makes er book, he generally does it ter win. Thet's 'bout all I know, and I guess it's all ez any one knows 'bout Plunge Thornton."

"I guess."

With a careless glance after the sulky that was just going around a turn of the road, Captain Wood walked into his stables to give a comprehensive look at the "string" of horses that he might or might not enter for different racing events, as he might determine in the future.

"Good-day, Cap."

"Good-day, Bill. Glad you looked in on me. I suppose I shall see you at some of the fall meetings?"

"I s'pose so, Cap. So long."

Snide Bill strolled out of the gate of the private driving-park with as much dignity as his bow-legs would allow, and with his head turned inquiringly toward the left, as usual, as if looking to see that nothing was being done behind him of which he would not approve.

He walked along the Park fence till he got to the end of it, where a large hotel, used by horsemen in the racing season, overlooked the track, or would have done so, had there been any windows on that side.

Sliding around the corner of the hotel, Snide Bill came upon the sulky, the chestnut horse and his sinister-looking driver, all quietly waiting for him, apparently.

Snide did not seem at all surprised to find Plunge Thornton here, though the latter had driven away, as if he had no intention of stopping within the next mile or so, at all events.

"Well?"

Plunge Thornton uttered the monosyllable in a tone of inquiry, while his fierce black eyes were bent upon the head groom, as if they would read his very soul.

"Don't stand no show at all."

"What?"

There was a threatening intonation in the word that Snide Bill resented at once.

"You asked me for my 'pinion, an' I s'pose yer want ther truth, don't yer?"

"I most certainly do," answered Plunge, as he flicked a fly from the chestnut's ears, that caused the horse to rear and kick with a fury that sadly endangered the sulky and its occupant for a few moments.

Plunge Thornton devoted himself to quieting the spirit of the horse, with a determination that the latter could not withstand. The man was in a bad temper, and he rather enjoyed venting his spite upon a brute that he knew he could thoroughly control.

Snide Bill stood back and watched the struggle between horse and man with that interest peculiar to one who often had similar battles himself.

At last, with one finishing cut of the whip, and a sawing of the steel bit that seemed as if it would break the horse's jaw, Plunge Thornton had the chestnut subdued and trembling all over.

"Cuss yer! You ain't got over yer old tricks yet, ain't yer?" hissed Plunge, as he saw with satisfaction that he had gained the victory.

Snide Bill stepped up to the horse and patted his neck, as he looked sideways over his shoulder at the driver.

"You mean to say that Flash o' Light will get away with Loafer, do you?"

"I do."

"Ah!"

Plunge sat in his seat in the sulky for at least five minutes, without speaking. Then an idea seemed to strike him, for he shook off his thoughtful manner with a quick movement, and beckoned to Snide Bill to come close to him.

"Snide?"

"Wal."

"You know what it will be worth to you for Loafer to win that steeple-chase?"

"I know what you tell me," was the non-committal reply.

"What I tell you goes. You know that," growled Plunge, sternly.

"Mebbe."

"How much did I tell you would fall into your hands from me if things went right?"

"You said somethin' 'bout five thousand dollars."

"That's what it will be. But I'll do better for you than that," he added, after a moment's pause. "Let Loafer win that race, and I'll make it eight thousand."

"Sure?"

"Sure."

"How am I ter do it?"

"Fix the hoss!"

"Daren't. 'Sides thar ain't no chance. Thar wuz er racket up ter ther house last night. Some durned thieves broke in an stole er pin or something from ther colonel's daughter—"

"Ada," put in the other quickly.

"Why, how did you know the gal's name?"

Plunge Thornton looked confounded for a moment. Then he answered, with a short laugh! "Why, I guess it's no secret that Colonel Wright's daughter is named Ada. Besides, I've seen her with her father."

"Oh. Wal, some thieves broke into ther house last night, and stole some uv her jewelry. Slugged her with er sandbag or somethin' too, I guess, for she wuz kind uv crazy, an' wuz er yellin' an' er hollerin', an' I run up from ther stables ter see what wuz ther matter, an' ther colonel he had run after ther fellers, an' didn't catch 'em, an' thar wuz she all by herself in this hyar fit like. I wuz bringin' her to when ther colonel came in. Wal, sir, durned ef she didn't take er sort uv dislike ter me when she came around, an' say that it upshot her ter see me. She didn't say I stole her brooch nor nothin'. But she just told ther old man ez it made her feel sick an' faint ter see me 'cause it suggested terrors to her."

"Funny," commented Thornton, quietly.

"Durned funny. But ther wuz't uv it wuz that this mornin' ther colonel came down to ther stable while I wuz er workin' 'roun Flash o' Light, and sez, sez he, 'Joe Morton will help yer with ther hoss in future. I want him ter stay with Flash continerally until I git er regular trainer ter take charge uv him,' sez he."

"Sez I, 'Don't yer think I kin do it, colonel?'"

"Sez he: 'Yes, but ther steeple-chase is an important event, an' I must hev er regular trainer. There'll be other people bettin' their money on ther race,' sez he, 'and it is only fair to them,' sez he, 'to hev er man ez is well known ez er trainer, 'sides you an' Joe,' he sez. O' course after thet I hed nothin' more ter say."

"Snide."

"Wal."

"You must help me to git that position."

"What?"

"I must be the trainer of Flash o' Light. You tell Colonel Wright to-night that I'm the best trainer that you know of, and that he had better get me if he can. Then, leave the rest to me."

Snide Bill stood still for a few seconds, looking at the other in silent admiration. At last, he slowly remarked, as if he was uttering an abstract truth that could not be questioned:

"Plunge Thornton, you are a great man."

CHAPTER VI.

DORA'S PLACE.

HAVING settled matters to his own satisfaction, Plunge Thornton gave a few whispered directions to Snide Bill, and driving his sulky under the shed of the hotel, took another chestnut horse and at once harnessed that long-legged, fiery, but not thoroughly cowed animal to a light buggy in a corner, that was evidently the private property of Mr. Thornton.

"Get in, Snide," said Plunge.

"What fer?"

"Because I tell you."

"Oh!"

Snide asked nothing more, but obeyed the order. Then Plunge Thornton, taking his seat beside the other, drove rapidly out of the small village in which Captain Wood's stables and private track were the most important institutions, and without which the village would hardly have been in existence at all.

It was dark when a buggy drawn by a long-legged horse drove slowly over the Central Viaduct in Cleveland. The horse was evidently very tired, and even the occasional application of the whip had no more effect than to make him move his ears impatiently and give a spasmodic jerk forward that subsided at once.

"He's 'bout gone fer ther day, eh, Plunge?"

"Yes. It's a long way between Wood's Mills and Cleveland, and I'd been driving him around the track for an hour before I saw you, and before I had any idea of coming here to-night. However, he will soon be home."

The Central Viaduct is a large structure across a canal, a ditch, and a railroad or two in the suburbs of Cleveland, the whole district being known generally as the "Flats." It must not be confounded with the great viaduct in the center of the city of which Cleveland is so proud, and which connects the West Side with the city proper in the handsomest part of it.

When Plunge Thornton chose the Central Viaduct instead of that leading to Superior street, he had several good reasons. One was that it was the nearest way to the place in which he intended to put up his horse. Another was that he did not know who he might meet if he came by the more traveled road, and he did not care to let his presence in Cleveland be known to certain people. He had other reasons, too, that may be developed as this narrative progresses.

The tall horse seemed to understand that his journeyings for the day were nearly over, for he dashed along a dusty road fringed on either side by great lumber-yards, with more spirit than he had displayed for an hour or two before.

"Hold up!" suddenly exclaimed Plunge to the horse.

As he spoke he jerked the line in his right hand with considerable force, and the horse, swinging around so suddenly as to nearly throw Snide Bill from his seat, ran into the deep shadows that might have hidden any uncanny place from the casual observer.

But both the horse and his owner knew where they were going, and they had no misgivings. Plunge pulled up with a sharp tug at the reins, and jumping down in the darkness, hitched the

long-legged horse to a post that could never have been found by a stranger unless he happened to tumble over it—a by no means improbable contingency in the inky blackness that prevailed.

"Get down, Snide."

Snide obeyed without a word.

"Now follow me."

"All right."

There was the sound of some one fumbling at a lock, and then Snide found himself seized by Plunge Thornton and dragged into a damp, earthy-smelling place, in which a strong odor like rotten sulphur also strove to impress itself upon the olfactory organs. This sulphurous odor, however, had been perceptible ever since they approached Cleveland, and they did not notice it particularly. The acid works in the outskirts of the city are an important industry of Cleveland.

"What's this hyar place?" growled Snide.

"Shut up!"

Plunge Thornton was not one of the politest individuals in the world sometimes.

A subdued tapping, and then Snide Bill was almost blinded by the flash of light that burst upon him and his companion.

A large room, in which a huge kitchen stove was in full operation, was revealed by the sudden opening of the door. The heat from the stove was almost unbearable to Snide, who had just come from the soft evening air outside, but Plunge, whose constitution enabled him to bear everything, strode right into the room, and standing with his back to the fire, looked curiously over the assembled company.

"Come in, Snide; and you, Skip, shut the door," he commanded, in the tone of a man that rules those around him.

Snide had hardly time to wonder at the fact that Kid the Skipper was doorkeeper, before a heavy hand clapped him on the shoulder, twisting his neck a little more than usual, and Wilk, the Tough, addressed him.

"Glad to see yer, my bloomin' covey! Didn't know v'ether ve would 'ave the pleasure of yer society or not to-night. You are sich a almighty slippery sort of bloke that ve never feels sure of yer until ve 'as yer, don't you know?"

Wilk was smiling as he spoke, but it was the sort of smile that was likely to become a frown at any moment, and Bill knew it.

It must not be supposed that the persons we have mentioned constituted all the occupants of the room. There were at least a dozen men besides, sitting at a long, rough pine table, on which a meal was spread, and to which the dozen were paying close attention.

There was coffee, corned beef, bread-cakes, pie, etc., in profusion, the whole bill of fare being such as would be given in any ordinary boarding-house to men who had to work hard every day, and needed strong food when they did sit down to a meal.

The boarders took but little notice of the newcomers.

The keeping the door was in the hands of Kid, the Skipper, and when he thought fit to admit any one, the rest were satisfied that the proceeding was a proper one.

Standing over the stove was an old woman, who, notwithstanding her gray hair and appearance of old age, was moving about with the agility of a girl of eighteen. She was pouring out coffee, handing bread and potatoes, and waiting upon the men at the table in a business-like way, that suited them exactly. She did not seem to care whether they enjoyed their supper or not, but it was a matter of professional pride with her that they should be unable to find fault with her attendance upon them.

Who or what she was very few people knew. She had been keeping this boarding-house on the Flats for twenty years, and she always answered to the name of Dora. Some people said she was Plunge Thornton's mother; others his housekeeper, and others that she was an aunt. No one knew for certain, and Plunge was not the man to enlighten people as to his private or family affairs. It was understood that he owned the property, and that he was practically the proprietor of the boarding-house business.

One other thing was understood by the patrons of the place (and, to some extent, by the police), that men who were not on the best of terms with the law, could always obtain accommodations at "Dora's Place," as it was called—provided they had money to pay for their food and lodging—and that no inquisitive questions would be asked by Dora or any of her other boarders as to the new-comer's business. Indeed, one of the strictest rules of the house was, that no one should ask another what time he was in, or, indeed, anything about himself, unless the information was tendered.

"Dora," said Plunge, when he had stood for a few minutes gazing upon the company.

"Yes."

"Anything new?"

"No, deary, no. All quiet. Four of the boys went away last night to do up some job or other, and two of the police came swooping around an hour afterward looking for them."

"Ah!"

"Yes, they came in their usual cheeky way, wanted to go all over the house, and—"

"Well, you let them go, I suppose?" interrupted the other, sternly.

"Yes, I did at last. But I told 'em at the beginning that I wouldn't. They come into a lone woman's place and want to run everything, and it's not a square thing. Why should they go through my house more than anybody else's eh? That's what I want to know?"

"Well, if you want to know, I'll tell you. It's because I've always told you to let them do it. You have nothing to hide, have you? Don't you do a straight-forward, honest boarding business?"

"In course I do!"

"All right. Then let the police come around all they want. They can't do you any harm, and it keeps them friendly to you. Don't be a fool in your old age."

Dora did not make any audible reply, but she muttered and mumbled to herself over the stove in a defiant manner that indicated her disapproval of Plunge Thornton's sentiments.

"Skip."

"Sir."

"Go and put up my horse. He's pretty tired, so you need only just rub him down with a dry cloth. Then make up his bed, feed him and leave him. But mind you lock the door properly and leave the bulldog loose with him."

"All right."

Skipper took a key from Plunge and disappeared by the doorway through which Snide had entered with the man that seemed to hold such a strong if mysterious influence over everyone in his vicinity.

In about a quarter of an hour Kid the Skipper returned and, the meal being finished, the men at the table strolled into an adjoining room, in which a bar, with bottles and glasses displayed, could be distinguished in the rather feeble light of two coal-oil lamps hung against the walls, with dirty reflectors behind them.

Dora cleared the remains of the meal from the table, took the pots and other utensils from the stove and raking the embers out of the grate, so that the fire would die, went into the bar-room after the boarders.

Plunge, Snide Bill, Kid the Skipper and Wilk the Tough only remained, the first named closing the communicating door and fastening it as soon as Dora had passed through.

Stay! There was some one else in the room—a man in the garb of a sailor, who lay in a drunken stupor on a well-worn horse-hair sofa in a corner behind the table, and who had not hitherto been noticed, even by the sharp eyes of Plunge Thornton.

"Turn that fellow out," commanded Plunge, briefly. "I don't see what Dora means by allowing a fellow to stay in the house in such a state. It's a disgrace to her hotel."

There was the faintest suspicion of a grin playing about Plunge Thornton's sinister mouth for an instant as he said this, but it was gone almost as soon as it appeared.

"I guess ther feller got like that while he wuz hyar," observed Skip. "They do sometimes, yer know."

"Well, turn him out, anyhow!"

But it was not such an easy task to turn the stranger out. He was so heavy, and was so thoroughly soaked with liquor that nothing could be done with him. He was lying flat on his face, and at every rough punch administered by the Skipper he only growled in a brutish way, without any other sign of consciousness.

"Old 'ard, Skip. I'll show you coves 'ow to do it. Blcw my bloomin' eyes! I'll wake 'im up!" shouted Wilk the Tough, who had been watching the Skipper's proceedings contemptuously.

"How would yer do it?" asked the Kid.

Wilk's answer was to seize the sleeper by the waist with both hands, and then, jerking him suddenly, with all his strength, drag him from the sofa to the floor.

The sailor fell with a crash, and then with a feeble oath rolled under the sofa, with nothing but his feet, incased in a pair of large rubber boots, protruding.

"Oh, let him alone!" directed Plunge. "The drunken brute is as well there as anywhere. And we have no time to fool with him now. Where's that emerald, Snide?"

"What?"

Snide Bill started as if he had been shot.

"What do you mean by jumping that way? Give me that emerald. You know you have it, and I want it."

"Who sez I hev it?" asked Snide, twisting his neck in his embarrassment until it seemed as if his head would be screwed off completely.

"I say you have it, and I want it," answered Plunge, sternly.

"Well, but, Cap, ain't yer a little previous? I don't think Snide knows nothing 'bout thet emerald," put in Kid the Skipper, in a tone of mild expostulation.

"What do you know about it?" snapped Plunge, turning on the Skipper with a suddenness that made that soft-stepping gentleman subside at once.

"Oh, nothing in partickler. Only—if there is any emerald, Wilk an' me are in on it. That's all."

"So you have it among you, have you?"

Snide Bill's neck twisted painfully, and he rubbed his broken nose with an air of vexation.

"Now, Snide, out with it," added Plunge, impatiently.

Snide Bill twisted and squirmed. Then he unbuttoned his coat, vest, and put his hand inside his flannel shirt and fished for something that he seemed to have some difficulty in finding. At last he brought out a small piece of rag, tied up tightly with black thread and fastened to a piece of string around his neck. Slowly he unrolled the rag and at last produced the brooch, with its great emerald and border of diamonds that he had taken from the throat of Ada Wright the night before.

"Aha!" almost shrieked Plunge Thornton, as he jumped forward and snatched the jewel from Snide Bill's hand.

The noise seemed to disturb the sleeping sailor upon the floor, for he grunted and rolled partly from under the sofa and back again.

"You shut up, anyhow," growled Snide, as he gave the sailor a tremendous kick, as some slight relief for his feeling of disgust at losing the emerald.

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNINVITED GUEST.

"WELL, that's a pretty good gag, I must say," remarked Kid the Skipper, *sotto voce*, to Wilk, as Plunge took the emerald to the lamp that hung against the wall over the sofa and examined it intently.

"It ain't no use yer kickin'. He's got ther bulge on all on us, an' I ain't goin' ter question nothin' ez he does. Ef he wants thet thar shiner, he's got ter hev it. You know thet," responded Snide Bill, in the same low tones, as he looked furtively at Plunge over his left shoulder.

"Snide," said Thornton, as, holding the emerald in his left hand, he poked at it with the point of a pen-knife.

"Yes."

"I'll give you this thing back again in about a week, just as good as it is now."

"You will?"

Snide Bill spoke joyfully. He knew that Plunge Thornton was a man of his word.

"Yes. You don't suppose I would rob you of your earnings, do you? But, mind: if you don't do the square thing by your pals there, who I know are good, honest men, I shall find a way to punish you. Remember that. They are entitled to a share of this pin, and I know it."

The Skipper and the Tough tried very hard to look the honest men Plunge Thornton called them, and if they did not succeed it was the fault of nature, who would not allow them to wear a virtuous aspect with comfort.

"So, I have it at last," mused Plunge, as he poked at the emerald. "Now, if I can only find out the secret of it, I am a made man, and then—Ada! Aha! Colonel Wright. You wouldn't look at Plunge Thornton for a son-in-law now, would you? You wouldn't like your pretty daughter to be the wife of a book-maker, even if he was to strike the greatest luck that ever comes from the track. No. You are blue-blooded; and a betting man, following the races and doing what he can in horseflesh would hardly be the sort of person you would fancy in your home circle. But—let me discover the secret hidden in this emerald, and Plunge Thornton could blossom out into Leonard Thornton, Esq., the many times a millionaire, the son of a noble house and heir to an English earldom, perhaps. Who knows? Ha, ha, ha! I seem to feel as if things were going my way at last. And yet—"

He put the emerald in his pocket hastily, and walked nervously up and down the room in deep thought. He was evidently worried, for every time he reached the sofa in the course of his parade, he bestowed a vicious kick upon the recumbent sailor to relieve his feelings, which attentions that devoted individual acknowledged by a subdued grunt, but was too far gone to resent in any way.

Snide Bill had dropped into a chair by the side of the stove and was engaged in conversation with the Kid and Wilk, but though he never stopped talking in low tones to them, his face, with its broken nose and twinkling eyes was always turned in the direction of Plunge Thornton, in whatever part of the room the latter might be.

"I shall know in the course of a day or two, whether the emerald is always to be a sealed mystery to me or not. But I feel, feel, that I am about to find it out."

Thornton seemed to recover himself with a jerk. He put the emerald in his vest pocket with apparent carelessness considering the value that he confessedly attached to it, and then looked around at Snide Bill and his two companions.

"Snide, I believe I will go with you to the colonel's."

"To-night, Plunge?"

"Yes; why not?"

"Nothin', only it's nigh eleven o'clock, an' it ain't ther custom to do bizness ez late ez that up at ther colonel's house. But, jist ez you say."

Plunge thought for a moment.

"You are right Snide, I'll stay at home to-night, but I'll go up and see the colonel in the

morning, and I shall call upon you to get him ready for my visit."

"Quick work!"

"Not too quick. You will see the colonel to-night. It is not ten o'clock by the way, Snide. You will lie if you can. It is not quite nine. But still, I do not care to go till to-morrow. Only remember this, I must be the trainer of Flash o' Light. Keep quiet, you fool, will you?"

The last sentence accompanied another kick at the drunken sailor, who had partly rolled over, and banging against the legs of Plunge had caused that gentleman to stagger slightly. If the sailor was not black and blue all over, as the result of the kicks and tumbles he had had that night, he must have been blessed with remarkably callous flesh.

"I told you I would fix ther bizness for yer, an' yer know I'll do it. Snide Bill ain't no fool!" observed that worthy, with sullen dignity.

"Then, suppose you get toward home. You can walk up to Superior street, and take a car from there."

"Oh, I know my way home without any directions, but I am not quite ready to go yet. I have some business to do with Kid and Wilk yet."

"How long will it take you to do it?"

"An hour, about."

"All right. It's nothing to do with me. I will be at Colonel Wright's at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning, and I shall expect you to have the way paved for me by that time. You understand?"

"Yes, yes, that's all right. But, see hyar, Plunge, I'd like yer to stay and see fair between me an' Kid an' Wilk."

"What are you going to do?"

"Divide some swag."

Thornton frowned darkly. Then, with a bound he was upon Snide Bill, holding him by the throat and forcing him backward to the floor.

"You scoundrel!"

"Hold—hold—on, Plunge!" gasped Bill. "What are yer doin' of?"

But, Thornton took no notice of these expostulations. Holding Snide in a vise-like grip, he shook him like a rat, and doubling a brawny fist, seemed as if he would strike him in the face.

The Skipper who had been momentarily paralyzed by the sudden onslaught, here interposed. He seized Plunge by the arm and asked him, in excited tones, what he was doing.

"Doing? This infernal villain dares to ask me to take part in his petty robberies, and then you ask me what I am doing! Why, I'll shake the life out of him!"

To emphasize his declaration, Plunge Thornton did indeed give Snide Bill such a lively shaking that his teeth rattled again, and his head twisted itself into all kinds of odd directions.

"All right, Plunge! He didn't mean nothing. He thought as you'd see everything square, that's all. Let up on him now."

Skipper spoke earnestly, for it was no part of his plan to see Snide Bill choked to death before his face on a mere question of sentiment.

Plunge's choler had somewhat subsided by this time, so with one last shake, he threw Snide Bill away from him, and dusted his hands against each other, as if they had been polluted by contact with the twisted neck of that hero.

"If you ever say or do anything again that implies my having any knowledge of your dirty work, I will kill you, as sure as your name is William Snyder, mind that, for I mean what I say," hissed Thornton, as he bestowed another kick upon the drunken sailor to relieve his feelings.

Snide Bill shook himself together, and his hand involuntarily sought the hilt of the long dirk-knife that was hidden in the waistband of his trousers. But he did not draw his weapon. He knew that before he could swing it for a blow at Plunge Thornton, a bullet would crash through his heart or brain, thus ending his aspirations and revenge at one shot.

Plunge Thornton saw and understood the movement of Snide's right hand, but it did not trouble him. He smiled slightly, and unfastening the door leading to the bar-room, went through and leaned against the bar, behind which Dora was serving whisky and beer to her motley gang of boarders.

"So, Plunge Thornton, you are too high-toned ter help in divying up ther swag taken in ther way of bizness, but yer'll play games with hosses an' emeralds, eh? I'll git even with yer for ther way you've chucked me 'round hyer to-night," muttered Snide Bill, as he secured the door and turned to his two companions.

It should be stated that Dora's place presented nothing to the outside world but blackness. Every window was closely shuttered, so that not a single ray of light penetrated to the exterior of the house, and all the inmates might have been fast asleep in their beds for anything that could be discovered by passers-by, if there happened to be any.

The drunken sailor was in a deeper stupor than ever, as Snide Bill, beckoning to his companions, softly opened the door, and his com-

panions had entered, and stepped into the dark hallway leading to the front door.

Kid the Skipper and Wilk followed him at once, the latter fastening the door by simply pulling it to. It was supplied with a spring-lock that could be opened only from the inside, as well as with several heavy bolts.

"Ther stuff is in ther stable," whispered Snide.

"All right, my bloomin' covey! That's as good a place as anywhere else, as I knows on," responded Wilk.

Out of the front door, which was also secured by a spring-lock like the other, but which Kid the Skipper fastened back as he went out, taking chances on any stranger trying to get in while they were absent—a very unlikely contingency, as he told himself.

It was very dark outside. The thunder storm of the night before had not cleared the atmosphere yet, and the heavy rack of clouds overhead boded more storm to come.

The house was in a narrow lane, with great stacks of lumber in the wood-yard opposite. Behind the house was a stagnant stream, anything but sweet in its odor, known as Walworth Run.

By the side of the house was a large wooden shed, with stabling for half a dozen horses. The only occupant of it at present was the long-legged chestnut horse, that was lying in one corner in a luxurious bed of hay, which he bit at lazily now and then in a reverie of equine comfort.

Kid had a key to the stable, and was well known to the bull-dog, that came bounding out of the corner. The animal licked his hand, and then bounded upon Snide Bill and tried to lick his face.

"Down, you brute, down!" whispered Bill. "Yer allers er slobberin' all over me. Git down!"

There was a ring of pleasure in Bill's tones, however. He liked animals of all kinds, and he was more affected by this manifestation of friendship on the part of the dog than he would have been by any kindness shown to him by one of his own species.

As for Wilk, that tough did not care for this particular dog, and the dog did not care for him. There had been a little trouble between them once, when Jack, the dog, put his muddy paws on a white vest worn by Wilk the Tough, and had been repulsed with a vicious kick. Jack had then tried to eat Wilk, but had been prevented by the interposition of Plunge Thornton. The quarrel between man and dog had ended then for the time, but all confidence between the two had been destroyed, and they always regarded each other with extreme distrust ever afterward.

"Is thet thar door shet?" asked Snide, as, having lighted a small stable lantern that he knew just where to find, he walked into a stall next to that occupied by the long-legged chestnut.

"Yes, I believe it is," answered Kid, who was too much interested in Snide Bill's proceedings to go away just to verify a fact.

"All right. Hold ther lantern."

Kid the Skipper did as he was told, and Snide began to pull the loose straw from a corner under the manger. Then he took a spade that lay on the floor, and that had evidently, judging from the earth upon the blade, been used for digging not long before, and, after turning up a few bricks that moved very easily under the pressure of the spade, dug out a few spadefuls of earth.

The scene was a weird one, in the flickering light of the lantern that, moving uneasily as Kid shifted his position again and again in his eagerness to see what was going on, the faces of the three men seemed to be suspended from the darkness without any bodies.

The faces were all deeply intent.

At last the spade struck something hard, and then all three, kneeling upon the loose earth thrown up, dived into the hole and dragged up a rough pine box some two feet square.

"Good, so far, eh, me coveys?" exclaimed Wilk, smiling benignly upon his companions.

Neither answered. Snide Bill, drawing his dirk, was prying off the lid, while the Skipper was holding the lantern where its rays would shine directly upon the edge of the lid.

One strong jerk, and the lid came off, revealing the swag that Snide Bill had referred to in the presence of Plunge Thornton.

It consisted of sealskins and other costly furs, made up into muffs, boas and similar small articles that could be easily packed away. There was several hundred dollars' worth of property, and the collection bore a remarkable resemblance to that which had been stolen from a well-known Cleveland dry goods store some weeks ago, and which had led to the arrest of no less a person than Kid the Slipper, who, after being held for a few days, had been released because there was no evidence against him.

"I hev hed this hyer stuff bidden away ever since, at ther place I told yer uv down ter ther lake-shore, an' I didn't think it wuz safe ter bring it out till now. It's all right, I guess. Now, 'bout ther divy. I think—"

"Hold on there!"

The command came in a deep voice, evidently assumed from the darkness near the door.

The three men instinctively put their hands to the pockets in which they carried weapons.

"Hands up! Don't you try that, or I'll shoot you all down before you know what has hit you!"

There was the sound of footsteps and a man, in the garb of a sailor, with his hat pulled down over his eyes and a great handkerchief concealing the lower part of his face, came forward, with a revolver in each hand, which he pointed full at the heads of the Slipper and Snide Bill.

"If either of you three make a suspicious move I will pull the trigger and shoot the two men I have covered. Do you see?" went on the sailor, cheerfully but hoarsely.

The three men actually trembled as they saw that this sailor, who was evidently not only perfectly sober, but full of fight, was the man they had referred to as a drunken brute when he lay, apparently asleep, under the sofa in the kitchen of Dora's Place.

For one instant they looked at him. Then Kid, whose perceptions were more rapid and keener than those of either of his companions, saw what to do. He dashed the lantern to the ground, and with a whoop of defiance, leaped to the door and was gone.

Hardly had he done so, when Snide Bill and Wilk followed. It was pitch dark, and the sailor would have had to fire at them on the mere chance of hitting them.

He saved his powder, however, as, with a chuckle, he took a bull's-eye lantern from his pocket and allowed its rays to light up his face.

Then, as he pulled down the handkerchief from his mouth, that he might laugh more easily, he chuckled with intense amusement and revealed a face that the reader already knows—that of Jaunty Joe Morton, the Jockey Detective!

"I think I have almost got even for some of the kicks those fellows gave me under the sofa," he muttered, as he turned his light upon the contents of the box, which had been tumbled all over the floor of the stall when Snide Bill and his friends so hastily departed.

CHAPTER VIII.

GROWING SUSPICIOUS.

COLONEL WRIGHT sat in his library about the time that Joe Morton found himself the sole occupant of the stable at Dora's Place.

Ada leaned over her father's chair, and the two were conversing earnestly.

"I do not know, papa dear. I was in a sort of dream. I knew that a man was moving about the room, and I knew that he wanted my brooch. How I knew it I could not explain. It was by some mysterious power that came to me from the Unknowable, and it only stopped short at my actual recognition of the man."

"But why did you feel so alarmed when Snyder approached you afterward. You say it was not he that tore the brooch from your dress?"

"No, papa, I do not know that it was he. In fact, I have no reason to think so. All that I was certainly aware of was that he came in when I screamed for help, and that he did all he could to find the thief. Yet his presence affected me in a terrible way, and he seemed in some extraordinary manner to be mixed up in the robbery to such an extent that I could not overcome my dread of him."

"Stranger!"

"Yes, papa, it does seem strange; but, after all, it is not worth while for you to trouble yourself over the silly imaginings of a nervous girl."

"But if these imaginings furnish a clew to the emeralds, Ada, I must take them into consideration."

"I should like to have the brooch again, of course, dear father. You always told me to take great care of it, and I have done so. It was worth a great deal of money, too, I know."

"It was valued at ten thousand dollars."

"Yes, so I have heard you say before. But you are so rich. Could you not get another like it? I have often heard you say that money will procure anything in this world."

"Almost. But this jewel was worth much more than its mere money value to me."

The colonel leaned his head in his hand and appeared to be lost in thought, as he muttered to himself: "I must find it, I must find it."

His daughter watched him anxiously, smoothing his hair with an affectionate touch as she bent over him. She had been raised in luxury and had never known the want of anything that money could buy. The one great grief of her life had been the loss of her mother five years before, and beside it every other trouble seemed unutterably insignificant. She was concerned over the loss of the jewel principally because it had been a present from her father. But, her father had given her plenty of other jewelry and she could cover herself with precious stones without the emerald if she saw fit. Still she saw that he was worried over the robbery and that made her attach more importance to it than she would otherwise.

Suddenly Colonel Wright got up and putting

on the soft felt hat that he wore about his premises, moved toward the back door.

"Where are you going, papa?"

"Down to the stables. You may come too, if you like."

Ada needed no second permission. Hastily throwing a light scarf over her golden hair, she was ready at once. Putting her hand into her father's arm, she went out to the porch with him, and looked somewhat fearfully into the black darkness of the lawn, at the bottom of which were the stables.

"Here, Caesar!" called the colonel, supplementing the words with a shrill whistle.

A big bulldog dashed quietly up to the porch from the darkness, and in obedience to a sign from the colonel, walked quietly into the library and lay down upon the soft tiger-skin rug before the fire-place, where his red eyes blinked in the lamp-light watchfully, as he occasionally allowed his lips to slide back and display an awe-inspiring row of yellow fangs. The property in the library was quite safe as long as Caesar remained on guard, and the colonel walked away without giving it another thought.

Reaching the door of the roomy stable in which Flash o' Light was the ruling power, the colonel knocked three times in a peculiar manner. He considered it only proper precaution to have a signal for the opening of this stable door. It was not desirable that strangers should have free access to such an important creature as the great steeple-chaser, Flash o' Light.

"Hi, hi!" squeaked a voice from the inside.

"Halloa!" answered the colonel.

"Golly! It am Kunnel Wright. All right, sah! Wait while I done open up the doah! Golly!"

Mose Lloyd made a great to do about shooting back the bolts and turning the key, but at last he finished the task, and throwing the door wide open, stood revealed in the light of the lantern, very wide awake, and evidently in considerable trepidation.

"Where is Bill?" demanded the colonel, after a hasty glance around him.

"Done gone out, sah."

"And Joe?"

"Wal, sah, he am not heah, at present. You see, kurnel," went on Mose, evidently anxious to shield Joe from any possible blame, "he's cousin am mighty sick, an' Joe he done gone down ter see him, down on the Flats, an' I know he won't be long."

"You confounded liar! Joe Morton has no cousin in Cleveland."

"Oh, yes, sah. Dar am several cousins ob Joe's down dar by de viaduck, an' I know dat's whar he am gone," declared Mose, who was a firm believer in the wisdom of sticking to a lie when it had once been told.

"And is there no one else but you around the stables?"

"No one else, sah. But, bress your soul, I kin 'tend to hosses. Dey are all right, while I'm around."

Mose Lloyd had entire faith in his own abilities, especially about horses, and would have taken the position of trainer for Flash o' Light without the least misgiving, had it been offered him.

Colonel Wright examined the horse closely, looked at each of his feet in turn, noted the temperature of his body, inspected his eyes and observed his teeth.

"Pretty good," he muttered. "Pretty good! Ah, my beauty, you'll show them what speed and bottom are when the time comes. Enter you? I should think I would. And I will win with you, or I will know why."

"Isn't he lovely, papa?" exclaimed Ada, as Flash o' Light put his soft nose against her face and whinnied softly.

"Yes, he is thoroughbred, and no mistake. Now, Mose, how long will it be before Bill or Joe will come back? Speak the truth for once, if it is in you."

"Well, then, 'deed, Mistah Wright, I dunno. I 'spects ter see one or de odder back any moment, but I dunno. Bill he went away airly dis yer' very mornin'. He said as how Joe Morton was in charge ob de hoss now, an' he could 'tend ter things for one day. So I 's'pose Bill he didn't count ter come back afore night."

"And Joe?"

"Well, Joe went out in a hurry this afternoon. He said, as he had some 'portant bizness dat required his pussional 'tention, but he wouldn't be long. He made me shut up de stables, an' he done stand outside till he heerd me lock an' bolt de doors. I lef' de trap in de ceilin' open, so I could go from one ter the other when I considered it 'spedient ter go to look after dem other horses in de 'joining apartment."

Mose gave this information with much dignity. Then he took a sponge and cloth from a shelf and began to rub down Flash o' Light with great care and industry.

Colonel Wright watched the proceeding for a few moments. Then telling Ada to remain where she was, he climbed the ladder that formed a steep means of approach to the loft, and thence to the other stable, and disappeared. He wanted to see how the other horses were getting along, and with Mose Lloyd's careful fastening of the

doors, there was no other easy way of getting from one part of the stable to the other.

Mose rubbed away at Flash o' Light, his white teeth glistening in the darkness as he emitted a low hissing to help him in his work. This was a trick he had picked up from an English groom with whom he had once been employed. He was not sure that it made his labors easier, but he thought it did, and he was sure that all English stablemen did it, which was a great thing in its favor.

Ada was fondling Flash o' Light, giving him a large cherry-cheeked apple that she had noticed on the shelf from which Mose took his sponge and cloth. This apple had been saved by the young gentleman for his own private consumption, but he was only too pleased to let Miss Ada have it, even though she gave it to a horse. He considered her the "decentest white ooman" of his acquaintance.

The colonel could be heard poking about in the other stable, and the occasional stamping of hoofs told that the horses were moving about in deference to hints from their owner.

Outside the wind was rising slightly, and the sighing of the breeze through the trees, with the rustling of the leaves and branches, seemed to promise a return of the fierce storm that had swept over Cleveland and the surrounding country the night before, during which Colonel Wright had indulged in his fruitless chase of the two men whom he suspected of stealing his daughter's emerald pin.

The stable door had blown shut, and as it had not fastened itself it rattled dismally against the door-post, and seemed almost to be in human hands, so persistently did it move to and fro.

Suddenly it burst wide open with a crash.

"Golly! Fer de Lawd's sake!"

Mose had dropped his sponge and cloth, and was now hanging to the tail of Flash o' Light with a desperation that would have been dangerous had not the horse been of a particularly kind disposition.

Ada, her tongue paralyzed with fright, could not utter a word, as she mechanically held out the piece of apple to Flash o' Light that she was giving him, and which he ate in that nonchalant way peculiar to horses when their human acquaintances are most disturbed.

Three men, hot, dusty, disheveled, had dashed into the stable, and one of them was fastening the door with feverish impatience. The other two each held a pistol in their hands.

It is no wonder that Ada and Mose Lloyd were frightened. The two men with revolvers were strangers, and although they made no threatening demonstrations, their intentions could hardly be lawful.

"That's right, for a while," growled the man at the door, hoarsely, as he fastened the bolts and turned the heavy key like one who knew the place.

He turned around so that the light of the lantern flashed across his face, and Mose, releasing the horse's tail, drew himself up, while a broad grin overspread his black face.

"Golly! Dis hyar is a funny snap. Why, Bill! Whar d'ye come from?"

"Never mind," answered Snide Bill, waddling to the middle of the stable, and trying to assume his usual careless manner, though his glances over his left shoulder, partly the result of trepidation, and partly of his deformity, operated somewhat against it. "Never mind, Mose. I wuz afraid uv gittin' caught in er shower, an' I run all the way home, thet's all. These hyar gentlemen air friends uv mine, Miss Ada."

The two friends—none other than Kid and Wilk, who had been holding their revolvers behind them since they came into the stable, were now trying to slip the weapons into their hip-pockets without being noticed. When they were introduced to the young lady, however, they both forgot themselves, and bowed with the pistols rather ostentatiously displayed.

Snide Bill was equal to the occasion. He could not ignore the presence of the pistols, but he accounted for them in his own ingenious way.

"These gentlemen are detectives, Miss Ada, friends of mine, and they air obliged ter carry pistols at all times. They took them out of their pockets while running up Euclid avenue with me, because they wuz afraid they mought jump outen thar pockets, d'ye see?"

Kid and Wilk nodded reassuringly, and managed to put their pistols out of sight.

"Wal, how's ther flyer?" continued Snide Bill, to Mose, trying to speak in his usual tones, as he glanced at Flash o' Light from nose to tail, and patting him gently on the neck. "How's ther beauty?"

"I done guess he's all right, Snide. I been 'tendin' to him mighty keerful."

"You've done well, Mose," was Bill's patronizing response. "You'll l'arn somethin' bout bosses in course uv time, ef yer listen ter what I tell yer, an' don't make er durned fool uv yerself."

This was a reference to Mose's escapade of the night before, when he came tumbling into the stable from the loft above. Mose understood it and tried to assume a proper expression of penitence.

"I'm sorry it happened, Bill, but I couldn't

help it. I done just tumbled down afore I knew where I wuz. You see, de hole wuz so big that I—Ow! oh! What am dat?"

The last sentence was emitted with a shriek of terror, and Mose jumped back, tumbling over Kid and Wilk in his hurry, and causing Flash o' Light to rear and plunge in a fever of excitement.

At the same moment something or somebody descended plumply upon Snide Bill's shoulders.

"Well, Snide, whar have you been, and who are these men?" demanded a stern voice.

"Colonel—Colonel—Wright," stammered Bill, nervously. "I didn't know ez you wuz hyar?"

"Perhaps not. But, I am disposed to look after my horses myself occasionally, especially when I find that I cannot trust men in my employ," said the colonel, as he came down the remaining steps of the ladder from the loft and looked suspiciously at Kid and Wilk.

CHAPTER IX.

A DARK SCHEME HATCHING.

THE Skipper and the Tough, obeying their natural proclivities for avoiding trouble by running away, were already on their way to the door when Colonel Wright addressed Snide Bill in such a significant manner.

They had run at a good round trot all the way from the stable on the Flats when the Jockey Detective so rudely disturbed the division of the proceeds of a robbery in which they and Snide Bill had evidently been concerned lately. Snide Bill had made straight for his stable in Colonel Wright's back yard, as being the safest retreat to be found, and his two companions had followed him instinctively. There were plenty of places known to them in the vicinity of the Flats where they might have hidden from the officers of the law, but somehow they did not seem safe under the present circumstances. They realized that the detective, whoever he was, who could so effectually hoodwink them by making them believe that he was a mere drunken sailor, was rather more dangerous than the ordinary members of the police force with whom they were accustomed to deal.

They had not expected to see any one at the stable in Euclid avenue except perhaps a groom or two. Now that they were brought face to face with the owner of the place, they were almost as embarrassed as if they had been caught by two or three police officers red-handed in the commission of a crime.

"Bill, I want to talk to you," said the colonel, as he looked his horse over. "Are your friends going to stay all night?"

"No, colonel. They only came to borrow my umbrella. Hyar it is."

So saying, he handed a very large, fat, blue-cotton umbrella to Kid, and, with a sly wink, led them out of the stable to the side door of the lawn, and bade them "Good-night," Colonel Wright watching him closely from the open doorway of the stable the while.

"I have engaged a trainer for Flash o' Light, Bill," said the colonel, as soon as Snide returned.

"Yer hev? I hope ez he's er good man. Yer want ter be mighty pertickler, 'cause er vallable boss like this hyar kin soon be spoiled."

Snide Bill spoke with some heat. He was excited and worried. He had never bargained for the colonel being as prompt in the matter, and it threatened to upset all his plans if the new trainer happened to be a stranger to him and an honest man.

"The man I have engaged is a good man. He knows his business, and I have great hopes that he will put Flash o' Light in such a condition that he will carry off that steeple-chase with flying colors."

"Um!"

"So, Bill, I do not intend you to be troubled any longer with Flash. You can devote your attention to the horses in the other stable, and I will let Joe Morton and the new trainer remain in entire charge here."

"Joe Morton!" exclaimed Snide Bill, in a disgusted tone, as he allowed his head to twist a little more.

"Yes, sir."

A ringing voice outside the stable responded to Snide Bill's utterance of the name, and the owner of it appeared in the doorway. He was cool and good-tempered as usual, and looked as if he might have been taking an evening stroll for the benefit of his health.

"I thought I heard you call me, Bill," he added. Then seeing Ada and her father, he removed his hat with a graceful sweep, and bowed to both.

Snide Bill was looking at him with staring eyes, while his stumpy broken nose dilated as if he were absolutely horror-stricken. He followed every movement of the detective, his eyes fixed upon a certain portion of his attire.

Protruding from his vest was a buckhorn knife-handle of peculiar fashion, which Snide Bill recognized as that of the dirk he always carried, but which he had dropped in the stable at Dora's Place, when he had been so uncere-moniously disturbed by the supposed drunken sailor, during the division of the swag some two hours before.

"Whar did he git thet thing?" muttered

Snide. "I'm goin' ter keep er watch over thet thar feller. I don't like him very much. An' when I don't like er man, I'm liable ter be ugly!"

"What did you say, Bill?" asked Joe, cheerfully.

Bill started. This blue-eyed young fellow seemed to have the faculty of reading one's very thoughts.

"Nothin', nothin'! I didn't say nothin' at all," answered Snide Bill, hastily.

"Joe," put in the colonel, "I want to talk to you. Come with me into the house. But first open that other stable-door. It is too much trouble to climb that ladder again. I want to show Bill that brown filly's off hind-foot. It seems inclined to crack."

Joe took a bunch of keys from his pocket, casually pushing the handle of the dirk out of sight as he did so; and, directing Mose to go into the other stable—by way of the loft—to take down the bars and bolts from the inner side of the door, he unlocked it and threw it open.

Snide Bill had remained in the other stall with Flash o' Light, ostentatiously examining him as if to see that he had been properly tended by Mose, Ada watching him with an unmistakable expression of distrust in her bright eyes.

"Bill!" called the colonel.

"Sir," answered Bill, as he reluctantly left Flash o' Light's stall, and went into the other apartment.

In obedience to a sign from the colonel, Mose went to Flash o' Light, while the former showed Bill certain real or fancied defects in the filly's foot. His object was to get the twisted-necked gentleman away from the steeple-chaser.

"So you can stay in this end of the building now, Bill. The new trainer will be here to-night or to-morrow morning. The last thing he said to me when we concluded our arrangements was that he hoped I would not allow any one in the stall, except Joe Morton, until he came. Then, if he wanted any other assistants, he would tell me. I take that to mean that he objects to the presence of a man who might be a rival in the management of Flash."

"Meaning me?" observed Bill.

"Meaning you—certainly. That is what I understood. So you had better stay here with this filly. She needs constant attention, anyhow. I do not like the appearance of her foot."

Snide Bill did not reply. He busied himself about the filly's foot, bathing it with warm water—for, attached to the stables were all the conveniences of a well-appointed kitchen, including hot and cold water—and taking no apparent notice of anything else in his vicinity. A sidelong glance from his small eyes over his left shoulder at Joe Morton meant something, however, if looks have any significance.

"I don't think thar is much ther matter with her foot, but I'll bathe it er few times, anyhow," he said.

"Come, Joe."

In response to this invitation from the colonel, Joe Morton followed his employer and Ada to the house, just as the first few drops of the threatened storm pattered on the gravel walk that led around the lawn to the door of the library.

"Now, what's in ther wind?" asked Snide Bill of himself, as having seen the three walk up the steps, in the light from the colonel's room, the door shut and left everything in the dark. "Thet thar Morton is er playin' some double game, ez sure ez my name is Bill Snyder. He won't let me go nigh ther Flash, won't he? Wal, we will see."

He dropped the filly's foot so suddenly that it jarred on the brick floor where the straw had been pulled away. Bill picked it up again and looked it over, while he gently rubbed his hand down the pastern. He could not be cruel to a horse or dog, however he might disregard the feelings of human creatures.

"I wouldn't hurt you, my beauty," he murmured softly. "I didn't mean ter let yer foot go down that way. It's all right, though. It's all right."

He strolled out of the stable to the door of Flash o' Light's stall. It was closed and bolted inside.

"Halloa, Mose. Open this hyar door!"

No response.

"Cuss that coon!" he muttered. "What's he doin' now? Mose, open this door."

He gave it a hearty kick to emphasize his demand.

"What yer want?" cried Mose.

"Ter get in."

"Well, yer can't do it. Kurnel Wright, he done tole me not ter let no one in, an', golly, ye'll have to stay out till Joe Morton comes."

"Joe Morton," hissed Bill between his set teeth. "I'll make it hot fer him yet. Whar did he git thet thar knife? I know it's mine, 'cause I never see one like it in my life. If he hed anything to do with puttin' up thet job on me ter-night, I'll make him wish he'd never met Snide Bill!"

He did not try further to get into Flash o' Light's stall. He understood that Colonel Wright did not wish him to have anything

more to do with the steeple-chaser, and whatever he might do in the future, he realized that at present his best policy would be submission. Besides, as will be seen, he had other matters on hand now.

His bandy legs waddled him to the side gate where he had dismissed Kid and Wilk, and his twisted neck assisted him in looking over his shoulder, to make sure that he was not watched by Mose or any other person, to whose notice he did not desire to call his proceedings.

Softly opening the gate, he admitted his two friends and led them to the stable in which were the four horses.

Adjoining this apartment was the living-room of the stablemen, with its kitchen paraphernalia, while over it were the bedrooms, in which were accommodations for half a dozen sleepers. They were seldom used, however, Colonel Wright requiring his men to rest on cots in the loft, or in the stables with the horses, which being light and well ventilated, were anything but unhealthy sleeping apartments even for human beings.

"Now, Snide, what are we a-goin' ter do?" questioned Kid, when the door had been closed, and Bill had waddled into the kitchen and back again to make sure that they were alone. "We have been a-waitin' outside that gate for the old man to get away, and we are both of us pretty well soaked through with the rain."

"Yes," put in Wilk the Tough, in extreme disgust, "two bloomin' nights together me an' Kid 'as 'ad to stand it. I ain't sugar nor salt, but blow me tight if I ain't 'ad all I vants of this 'ere. Vorkin' an' a-vorkin', an' gittin' swag for nothin'. I thinks as you ought to make the loss of that there stuff good to me an' Kid. It was through you as we lost it."

"You're er cussed fool!" responded Bill, angrily. "What d'ye suppose I knew 'bout that sailor chap bein' a cop? D'ye think he'd ever hev got out uv that room alive ef I'd had any notion ez he wuzn't all squar' and fair?"

"I dunno vhat yer thought an' I don't care," retorted Wilk. "You can't bluff me like that. Me an' Kid vorked 'ard for that there stuff, an' we took our chances on gittin' to the pen for it. Then, jist vhen we expect to git our revard for it, some bloomin' thievin' sailor comes in an' moseys off with all of it. Crickey! It's enough to make a honest tradesman go out of the business altogether. Vhy, I never 'ad no sich scurvy trick like that played on me in England. Vhen I had vorked the thing up good an' got the stuff I could allers git rid of it the next day if I wanted to, and no vun the viser."

"Better go back ter England then, if they treat yer so well thar," answered Snide Bill with a sneer. "Howsoever, that ain't ther question now. What we hev ter do is ter look after this hyar other job—'bout Flash o' Light."

"Then there's that there em'rald what you tried to sneak away to yourself," continued Wilk, in grumbling tones, and disregarding Snide's remark. "Vhen do ve git our 'alf of that? You jist give that up to Thornton as if he owned it, vithout consulting me an' Kid, yer partners, at all. It's a bloomin' shame, an' I considers as ve have been treated mean."

"The emerald is all right. Don't you worry about that."

"Is it? Vell, do you know as Kid an' me ain't got a dollar atween us to buy no grub nor nothin'. Ve vas dependin' on 'gittin' our share of them there furs an' things to-night to pull us out of the 'ole ve have got into."

Kid the Skipper allowed his partner to talk without interposing any remarks of his own. He mentally indorsed all that Wilk was saying, but he did not deem it necessary to make the quarrel his own so long as it could be carried on successfully without him. If Wilk had not said so much and said it so well, the Kid would have done it himself. It was true that their finances were at a very low ebb, and that the loss of the property they were about to divide in the stable connected with Dora's Place had upset all their plans for existence for a while, but Kid felt sure that Snide Bill could suggest some way of ameliorating their condition, and he was not very much worried about it. He was not of such an excitable temperament as his Cockney friend, either, and was content to await developments.

"How much money do you want ter tide yer over er few days?" asked Snide Bill, quietly.

"Oh, ten dollars would help me to git my washin' an' pay my board till the end of the week, if I kin find a safe place to go. I don't feel liko trustin' my bloomin' self at Dora's Place now, after the little game of that sailor cove," returned Wilk, with a shrug of his broad shoulders.

"Ten dollars do fer you?" said Bill, inquiringly at Kid the Skipper.

"Yes."

"All right."

Bill took a wallet from a pocket inside his vest and opened it so that neither of his companions could see whether it contained much or little. He produced from it two ten-dollar bills and handed one to Kid and Wilk respectively, returning the wallet to his pocket at once.

"Flush, Bill?" asked Kid, shortly.

"None o' yer bizness."

"Right you are, my bloomin' covey. It

don't matter nothin' to us 'ow much yer got, as long as you do the right thing by your pals," observed the Tough, whose spirits were easily raised, as well as depressed.

"Now, boys," whispered Snide, "I hev er job fer yer to-night."

"To-night?" echoed Kid.

"To-night?" growled the Cockney.

"Yes. It's got ter be done within the next hour or two. Soon after midnight. Thar must be no slipping up in it, either. Got knives as well as pistols 'bout yer clothes?"

Both his listeners nodded.

"Good. Some durned skunk hez mine, but I've got another in my valise up-stairs. So we are all heeled."

"Must be a tough job," hazarded Kid.

"Not pertickler. But it must be done keerfully. Hush! Hush!" hissed Snide, with his finger to his lip.

The sound of footsteps crunching the gravel of the walk around the lawn came to his ears distinctly through the noisy pattering of the rain that was now descending in that steady way that promised a continuance of several hours.

CHAPTER X.

MIDNIGHT VILLAINY.

FOR a few moments the three worthies stood quite still as the footsteps came nearer, and at last stopped at the door of Flash o' Light's stable.

They heard a rattling at the latch, as of some one trying vainly to open the door. Then Jaunty Joe's voice:

"Mose! Mose!"

"Yes, Joe. I'm coming. I done shet the bolt!"

"Yes, you black rascal! You are allers up to some bloomin' game o' yer own, I bet a bob!" growled Wilk.

"Close yer gab, will yer!" commanded Snide, in a fierce whisper.

The sound of sliding bolts ensued. Then the creaking of the hinges told that the door had been opened, while a loud bang proclaimed as certainly that it was closed again, with Joe Morton inside.

"Go to bed, Mose," ordered Joe, pleasantly, as he lighted a gas-jet, which guarded by a wire cage, protruded from the wall. "Go to bed. I guess the Flash is all comfortable for the night."

"Yes, I done make up his bed, an' he got a better one than plenty of human folks to-night, too."

"He deserves it more than plenty of human folks, as you call them, too, Mose, I expect."

"I dunno 'bout that, but I guess what you say goes. Good-night, Joe."

Mose crawled up the ladder to the loft, in one corner of which, immediately over the head of Flash o' Light, was a cot bed. The loft extended over both stables, with a trap leading to each. That over the adjoining apartment in which were the four horses was closed and bolted on the upper side.

Mose walked over to this trap, saw that it was fastened by the light of the lantern he carried. Then he reconnoitered in every direction to make sure that he had his sleeping apartment to himself.

"I doan't trust that dar Snide Bill," he muttered. "He too gol-darned fresh. If he t'inks he kin git over dis hyar coon, though, he mighty mistook. Mose Lloyd too 'cute fer him, an' doan't you forgit it."

Mose had no one but himself to talk to, but that did not detract from the interest of the conversation. In fact, it was all the better, because he had an auditor who was not likely to disagree with him.

At one end of the loft were several bales of hay neatly piled up, while beside them was a large corn-bin, some five feet high and about ten long. It was about half full of corn. Another bin of the same size, containing oats, stood along the wall at right angles with it, while a sack of bran stood by the side of the hay.

Colonel Wright's horses were all well fed. They represented too much money, and their owner was too much a lover of them, to permit of their suffering anything approaching a famine.

The loft had half a dozen windows, barred outside, and was as comfortable a bed-room in the matter of air and cleanliness as could be desired. Mose sometimes slept in the loft and sometimes in one of the stables below, according to circumstances, but now, that new arrangements had been made for the care of the steeple-chaser, he would probably stay up-stairs entirely.

"Everything seems all right, an' I guess Mose, dat you'd better turn in. You'se dead tired, sure 'nuff," he muttered, as he concluded his inspection.

Snide Bill had been listening, and he had a pretty accurate idea of what was being done by Mose and Joe Morton. He had heard the detective tell Mose to go to bed, and heard the boy's footsteps on the ladder and overhead, and knew that in a short time he would be fast asleep.

What then?

Snide Bill had, in the few words whispered to

Kid and Wilk, given them an inkling of the scheme he had in view, but not its details.

He meant to steal the horse!

That was all he had confided to them. How he would do it and what was to be the final destination of Flash o' Light he had not taken the trouble to say. He had more brains than the two together, and he had the natural contempt of intellect for mere brute force.

Snide Bill had reasoned the matter out, and had come to the conclusion that, once in possession of Flash o' Light, beyond the knowledge of Colonel Wright, he could make not only the \$8,000 promised to him provided Loafer won the steeple-chase in the fall, but a sum of money in addition that would be nothing less than an actual fortune.

To do this he must have the help of the two men in the stable with him now, and he intended to have that help, whether they desired to give it to him or not.

"Them thar dunder-headed fools!" he thought, as he glanced at them over his shoulder. "They think they're smart, uv course. Wal, when they put themselves ag'in' Snide Bill they bite off more'n they kin chaw. I'll hev Flash o' Light fer myself, an' they'll hev to help me git him, no matter what it costs. It's jest ez well ter hev fellers like them on the string. They're useful, an' when you don't want 'em no longer, why—yer kin jest turn 'em over ter ther law."

Snide Bill grinned involuntarily as these thoughts ran through his brain, much to the disgust of Wilk the Tough, who was watching him suspiciously.

"'Ow long are ve to stand 'ere doin' nothin'," demanded Wilk, at last. "I van't to go somevheres an' git some sleep. It don't seem as if ve vas goin' ter git much good from stayin' 'ere vith you."

"Just wait er little while, an' I'll give yer plenty ter do. Don't yer be so durned impatient," replied Snide Bill, as he listened intently for any sounds in the adjoining stalls.

"Wilk, you don't know nothin' yerself, an' yer seems ter think we are all alike," added Kid.

"I knows er bloomin' sight too much for sich a bloke as you are, Kid, the Skipper. Mind that, an' I don't vant you to put on no airs vith me, 'cause ef you do I'll have that there fight vith you right 'ere, instead of waitin' till ve kin meet in a twenty-four-foot ring," retorted Wilk, angrily.

"What fight are yer talkin' 'bout?" asked Snide Bill, with a sinister glance over his shoulder.

"He don't know what he's er-talkin' 'bout."

Kid turned his back on the Cockney as he thus contemptuously expressed himself.

Wilk was evidently about to make some retort that would have probably led to blows between himself and the Kid, when Bill got a hand on the arm of each of the disputants and shook his head at them imperiously.

"Listen," he whispered. "Joe is lyin' on his cot in ther stall with Flash. I kin hyer ther bedstead creaking. Now, he will be asleep in ten minutes, an' we kin do what we hev ter do. See?"

Snide Bill knew Joe Morton's ways well, and he spoke with the experience born of observation when he predicted that the detective would soon be asleep. Joe Morton was blessed with a sound constitution, and never had to woo the drowsy god long when once he lay down.

Obedying his directions, Kid and Wilk seated themselves upon a wooden bench against the wall, while Snide looked over the horses to make them comfortable for the night, and again examined that off hind-foot of the filly who was supposed to be a little weak in that member.

It did not matter whether Joe heard Snide or not, as long as he did not suspect the presence of Kid and Wilk.

"Ther cuss seems ter find out everything that he ought ter know nothin' 'bout," muttered Bill; "but I'll fix him this hyar trip, ez sure ez my name is Snyder."

He rubbed so hard at the filly's leg as he made this observation that the animal winced.

"Whoa, my beauty. Who-oa! I didn't mean ter hurt yer. Yer foot is tender. I kin see that. Whoa!"

He was so busy with his warm water and sponge that ten, twenty, thirty minutes passed before he was ready to carry out his scheme with regard to Flash o' Light, whatever it might be.

"Well, I'll be durned ef both uv them thar fellers ain't asleep!"

Sure enough, Kid and Wilk, tired out with a long day of worry, and a night of excitement, had allowed their heads to drop back against the wall, as they sat upon the bench, and had gone off into the land of dreams together. They could not agree for any length of time when awake, but they were apparently on the best of terms asleep, for Kid's head had been sliding down the wall until it rested upon Wilk's shoulder, the Tough in turn allowing his cheek to press gently upon the top of Kid's rather shabby Derby hat.

"Look like ther babes in ther wood," commented Snide, to himself. "Wal, they kin sleep fer an hour or two perhaps. I ain't sure ez I

know how I'm er goin' ter do this hyar job, an' mebbe I kin manage it better by myself than with them."

Snide Bill went quietly into the kitchen and thence by a ladder to the bedrooms above, in which as heretofore stated, there was room for half-a-dozen sleepers, but which were untenanted at present.

From an old valise in the corner he took a large dirk-knife, very much resembling that now in the possession of Joe Morton, but with a black handle instead of the buckhorn that enabled him so easily to identify the latter.

There was a wicked gleam in the eye of Snide Bill as he drew the knife from its sheath and felt its point on his finger. He had a weakness for knives when he deemed it necessary to use a weapon. His own expression was "a knife never misses fire, and it does not bark like a pistol."

To crawl quietly down the stairs and look intently about the stable was the work of a few seconds. Then, noiselessly opening the door, without disturbing his sleeping companions, he made his way to the door of the stable in which Joe Morton and Flash o' Light were quietly settled for the night.

Snide had satisfied himself that the door had not been bolted and barred. It was secured simply with its spring lock, of which Snide still had a key.

"No matter how keerful these hyar smart ducks are, they're allers sure ter leave somethin' or other undone. I've noticed that all my life."

He grinned as he made this inaudible observation and, softly fitting his key to the lock, opened the door.

If one could imagine a ghost with bandy legs, a broken nose, or twisted neck, and eyes too close together, Snide Bill might have seemed like one of those beings, so softly did he tread upon the brick floor of the stable.

The gas in its iron cage was burning brightly, for Joe, lying in his cot in a dark corner not far from the steeple-chaser's head, was out of its glare altogether, and he did not like to leave the stable wholly in darkness.

Bill glanced about him, and moving in his gentle way to the near side of Flash, whispered in his ear in the soothing tones that always seemed to please the horse and assure him that his human companion was indeed his friend. Bill had been around Flash for some time, and the animal loved and trusted him with that brute affection that is utterly blind to the shortcomings in general mankind.

"So-ho! Quiet, Flash! Quiet, old boy!"

Flash o' Light bent his head and put his nose in Snide's face, with a caressing movement, to which the man responded by patting his beautiful arched neck and rubbing his cheek against it.

"Durn it! Ef men wuz like hosses I don't believe ez I c'u'd ever do er dirty action," thought Snide. He always felt softened in the presence of a horse that he loved.

But he could not afford to indulge in sentiment, at that moment. He had important work to do, and but little time in which to do it.

"Whar's that Joe?" he muttered.

He stepped up to the side of the sleeping detective and looked down upon him as he lay in his cot with an arm under his head and the other upon the buckhorn handle of a knife that protruded from his waistband.

"Cuss him!" hissed Snide, as he saw the knife. "Thet settles it!"

When he first came into the stable, Snide Bill moved cautiously and timidly, as if he were not quite resolved in the work he had to do. The sight of his own knife in the possession of the young stableman removed all this doubt in an instant. It brought to his memory the way he had been beaten at Dora's Place, and the unaccountable reappearance of his own weapon in the belt of this very young man who, he felt certain, was not all he seemed, sent the blood through his veins in a rivulet of fire. He cared far nothing now but to revenge himself upon Morton by robbing him of the valuable horse left in his care!

But, how to do it!

"If I tries ter take thet hoss out now he'll wake ez sart'in ez I do it. Thar's only one way ter fix him, an' thet way I'll take."

From his pockets he drew a large red cotton handkerchief and a bottle of almost colorless liquid. He held up the two articles in the light of the gas for an instant and examined them closely.

"All right! Now, Mister Everywhere Joe, we'll see ef we can't make things pleasant for you."

He bent over the cot with the bottle in his left hand and the handkerchief in his right. Then something seemed to occur to him, and laying the handkerchief on the bed, he put his finger to the buckhorn handle of the knife in the waistband of the unconscious sleeper, and tried to pull it out from beneath the hand that lay nervelessly upon it.

"Durn it! It won't come. Wal, I'll hev ter take my chances on it. Anyhow, it will be wuss fer him than fer me ef he happens ter wake up."

The fingers of the sleeper involuntarily closed

upon the handle when Snide tried to displace it, indicating that even in his dreams the stableman had some instinctive apprehension of danger.

"Hold on ter it, yer durned fool, an' much good may it do yer."

As this thought passed through his mind, Snide picked up the handkerchief. Then putting the cork of the bottle between his teeth he pulled it out with a plunk. At the same moment a pungent and peculiar odor mingled with the wholesome air of the stable.

CHAPTER XI.

GATHERING CLEWS.

WHEN Mose had dropped upon his cot up-stairs he had found more difficulty than usual in getting to sleep. He had tossed and tumbled and listened and thought of everything under the sun until, just as he had almost made up his mind that he might as well get up and walk about for an hour or two, slumber overtook him and he was sound asleep.

How long he was asleep he did not know, but suddenly he seemed to hear the sound of his own name right in his ear:

"Mose!"

He tried to answer, but his voice would not come. He felt somebody kneeling upon his chest.

"Mose!"

There it was again. Somebody was calling him. If he could only get this man or monster from his chest he would answer at once.

"Mose!"

For the third time. Now it had changed in its tone, from the command that it had been in first, and had become almost a supplication.

"Mose!"

Oh, if he had some one at hand to pull this terrible enemy from his chest. This creature that he was sure now was not human, whose sharp knees were crushing the breath out of him, so that he gasped as if he were drowning.

"Mose!"

A wail of agony now.

"Get off'n me! Get—get—"

With a mighty effort he was awake, and sitting up in his cot, looking wildly about the room. No one was there but himself, and the supernatural being upon his chest was only a nightmare.

But no. What was that? Surely he heard his own name uttered in a faint voice, as of some one dying or fainting.

"Mose!"

In a second Mose was out of bed, and into his trousers and vest, but with bare feet.

"Hi! I'm comin', Joe! What's de matter?" he cried, energetically, as he scuttled across the floor toward the trap leading to Flash o' Light's stall.

"Mose!"

No mistake about it now. It was Joe Morton's voice, and yet it sounded very unlike the deep, full tones that generally proceeded from the young man's lips.

Mose reached the ladder, and slid down like a monkey. He had barely touched the floor of the stable, before he understood the whole situation almost instantly.

The door of the stable was half open, the rain pattering in on the brick floor just inside, and—Flash o' Light was gone!

On his cot in the adjoining stall lay Joe Morton, bound hand and foot, and surrounded by a strong smell of something that Mose did not recognize, but which he felt certain, from its peculiar pungency, was chloroform. His own expression afterward was, that it was like toothache drops, and he "always hearn tell dat dar was collaraform in dat stuff."

A black-handled knife, with a sharp point, lay on the bed by the side of Joe, and with this the boy cut the ropes that had bound the detective.

"What's de matab, Mr. Mauton? Who's been hyar? What fer didn't yer call me soonah? I was a-sleepin' right dar over yo' head, an' I would ha' come down, and done cleaned out dem dar fellers afore dey would know what struck 'em!"

Mose looked very valiant as he said this, and no one could have doubted that he meant what he said. Joe did not doubt it, at all events, as was evidenced by the way he put out his hand to Mose, smiling feebly the while.

"I called you as soon as I could, Mose. But, they put the chloroform into me and made me helpless the very first thing. I have no idea who did it, either. But," he added with sudden fierceness, as he struggled into a sitting posture and held his aching head between his two hands, "I will find out before they can reap any profits from their theft of Flash, if I have to chase them to the end of the world."

He fell back as he said this, and Mose, frightened, brought a tin mug of water from the hydrant in a corner of the stable. Joe drank the water, and it revived him so that he was able, not only to sit up, but to get upon his feet, and walk tremblingly, with the boy's assistance, to the door.

"Let me go out into the rain. It will do me more good than anything else," he said, as Mose tried to hold him back.

"But, you'll git wet. Wait while I git yer an umbrella?" suggested Mose.

The young man laughed. Sick as he felt, he could not help being amused at Mose's idea of his going out into the rain for the sake of its reviving influence, and yet putting up an umbrella to keep it off.

"Never mind the umbrella, Mose. I want to get the rain on my face and head."

He stood out on the wet grass of the lawn and let the rain pour down upon him. As it soaked through his hair and ran in streams down his face, it cleared his brain and gave new strength to his limbs. His legs no longer trembled, and his arms, that had been benumbed by the tightly-bound cords as well as the anæsthetic, gradually felt like themselves again.

In a quarter of an hour, with the exception of a slight headache, Jaunty Joe felt but few ill-effects from the attack that had been made upon him.

But the return of his faculties in a clear state was not attended altogether with satisfaction. It enabled him to realize more thoroughly that he had not fulfilled his trust with regard to Flash o' Light. The horse had been left in his care, and he had allowed it to be stolen under his very nose. True he had been overcome in his sleep by some unknown thief, and had suffered bodily harm as a consequence thereof, but he felt that that was nothing in the nature of an excuse. He should not have allowed himself to be thus overcome.

Joe, the Jaunty, was not the man to shirk the responsibility of the loss. He knew that to him would Colonel Wright look for the safe-keeping of his horse, and that he could expect little sympathy for his own sufferings from that gentleman.

Disregarding the fact of his clothes being wet through, and clinging to him in a most uncomfortable way, Joe Thornton went back into the stable, shut the door and made a close search of the whole place, Mose watching him in respectful silence, save when answering his questions.

"Mose."

"Yes."

"What was the first you knew of the trouble down here?"

"I didn't know nuffin' till I came down."

"Why did you come down?"

"'Ca'se I heerd yo' hollerin', dat's all."

"I was not hollerin', as you call it, very loudly, was I?" asked the detective with a smile.

"I don't think I had a holler in me."

"Deed yo' wasn't! Dat am a fac'. Hows'ever I didn't know nuffin' was goin' on down hyar till I heerd yo' say Mose! Mose!"

"You did not hear any struggle or footsteps, or anything of that kind, then?"

"No. Nuffin'!"

"Ah! The rascals did their work silently, as well as thoroughly, then," commented Joe.

While talking Joe walked into the stall where Flash o' Light had been standing when his keepers went to sleep. The noble animal was never tied to his stall. Colonel Wright did not believe in that sort of treatment for his horses. A halter had hung on a nail near his head, over the manger. This halter had now disappeared.

"So! They just led him away by the halter, did they?" muttered Joe.

He glanced around, and started as he made a fresh discovery.

"No, by gracious! The saddle and bridle are gone, and there is the halter lying against the wall. They were evidently going to lead him away. Then they changed their minds, and decided to ride him. 'Um! 'Um! Well, he must have been ridden by one man. What did the others do, for I know there were at least three. Before I quite lost consciousness, and when my sight was so dim that I could not distinguish anything clearly, I saw three men bending over me, and I heard a voice, sounding as if it was a long way off, say: 'He's safe now. Away with you, and meet me at the old place to-morrow night.' Yes, those were the very words, I know. They came back to me like a half-forgotten dream. Strange that the chloroform's effect should be to make me forget the tones, even though I remember the words. However, the words are something to recollect. I will try to think, after a while, just what they mean. It is like a difficult problem, and will take some time to work out."

Mose had been looking about the floor during the detective's ruminations, and had just picked up the black-handled knife that he had thrown down when he had cut the detective's bonds.

"What is dis, Joe? Might not dis hyar knife help yer to find de thieves? It was left by one ob dem, I s'pose, eh? Don't you t'ink?"

"You are right, Mose," answered Joe, taking the weapon and looking closely at the blade.

"Ah! This is something indeed."

He fumbled at his waistband, and then, looking down, discovered, for the first time, that his own knife was missing.

"What's de matab, Joe?"

"Nothing, nothing," answered the detective, hurriedly. "You say this knife was lying on the floor?"

"On de bed."

"On the bed? By my side?"

"On yer chest."

"Ah!"

Again the detective ran his eye down the blade until his gaze rested upon a certain spot some two inches above the hilt-guard.

"So, so! Made at the same factory, in the same year, and part of the same lot. Number 1426*. I never saw but one knife like this before last night, and that was the property of—"

He paused, and again closely examined the blade. The number and asterisk seemed to have a peculiar fascination for him.

"That buckhorn handled affair that I got last night down on the Flats and this one are of the same style as that other. Well, well, put this and that together, and who knows but that I may be on the trail of more than one mystery now?"

"Hyar's a red handkerchief," announced Mose.

The detective took the article and at once the sickening odor of chloroform became stronger as it was moved.

"Yes, that is the handkerchief they used to send me to sleep, Mose."

"Hyar's er bottle, too. I s'pose it done contained de collaraform, eh?"

"Yes," said Joe, smelling it. "Ah, the label has been torn off. The rascals wouldn't leave any more clew than they could help. I wonder that they did not take the bottle and handkerchief with them."

"Pr'aps dey hadn't time," suggested Mose.

"Yes, there's sense in that idea, Mose. I dare say they left in a hurry at last. Fellows in the burglary business very often go away leaving a trail broad enough to be followed by a baby blindfolded. That's one of their weaknesses."

"This bottle, though, they might easily have taken with them. But, you see how careful they were beforehand. They apparently thought that they might have to leave the bottle behind them, so they took the label off as well as they could. It seems to have stuck pretty tight, however, and they must have spent some time in scraping it off with a penknife or something."

"Golly, Mr. Manton, you're as smart as a reg'lar detective. 'Deed you is."

"Am I?" observed Joe, with a smile.

It is hardly necessary to say that no one about Colonel Wright's premises had any idea that the quiet, unassuming young man who was content to act as an ordinary groom for the furtherance of justice was one of the most noted detectives in the United States. Jaunty Joe Morton could keep his own counsel, or he would not have achieved the success he had in his chosen profession. What business had first brought him into Colonel Wright's employ matters but little, now. Suffice it to say that, having settled it within a day or two, he was now staying in behalf of the colonel's success with Flash o' Light and to clear up the mystery of the emerald.

He was still looking at the bottle where the label had been scraped off, almost, if not quite, as intently as he had at the knife, when Mose touched him on the arm and said: "What you found on dat bottle—anything?"

"Yes," was the quiet reply.

CHAPTER XII.

FLASH O' LIGHT'S ABDUCTION.

WHEN Snide Bill pulled the cork out of the bottle with his teeth, as related in the tenth chapter, a gush of the fluid came into his face, giving him all he could do to repress a violent sneeze.

He did repress it, however, and pouring a quantity of chloroform upon the handkerchief, he laid it over the mouth and nose of the sleeping detective.

There was a hasty movement on the part of the half-conscious young man, but Snide Bill poured more chloroform upon the handkerchief, allowing it to soak through, at the same time kneeling upon the detective's chest so that, taken by surprise, and rapidly succumbing to the anæsthetic, he was powerless to resist.

"Cuss him! I didn't think I could do it myself, but I b'lieve ez I kin, after all," muttered Snide, as the struggles of his victim became fainter and fainter.

At last the detective lay quite quiet, and Snide, pouring the remainder of the liquid upon the handkerchief, ran quickly into the next stable for Kid and Wilk. He had decided, after all, that he must have some help, much as he would have liked to dispense with their assistance. His experience on the plains had been that a man's most trustworthy partner is in his own person, and his naturally suspicious temperament was in entire accord with the teachings of this experience. But in this case he was satisfied that he must use the two men who, in his heart of hearts, he considered little better than blockheads.

He found them both on the bench in the other stable, sleeping in the picturesque positions already described. Giving them both a rude shaking, he soon brought them to some sort of sense of their surroundings.

"Kid, I want yer."

"All right," was the sleepy response.

"Well, wake up, an' knock thet durned fool with yer inter life, will yer?"

The "durned fool" referred to was, of course, Wilk the Tough, who was just wakeful enough to realize that he had been insulted.

"What ther bloomin' 'nation d'ye mean?" he demanded. "I don't 'low no cove ter call me a fool, whoever he is. My name is Wilkins Smith, and I kin fight any light-weight in the country for money. I—"

"Shut yer mouth an' listen ter me," interrupted Snide in a fierce whisper. "Thar's bizness on hand, an' thar's money in it fer you and Kid."

"Bloomin' good job, too. I 'aven't done nothin' that brought in money fer a month, blow me if I 'ave. At the same time, I don't allow no cove to—"

Wilk was evidently still smarting under Snide Bill's contemptuous reference to him, but Snide stopped any further grumbling about it by shaking him by the shoulder in a very familiar, and by no means gentle manner.

"Shut up, I tell yer, an' ef yer want any satisfaction fer what I've said 'bout yer, yer kin hev it some other time. Come with me."

Snide sidled out of the stable, followed by Kid and Wilk, who, now that they were wide awake, were eager enough to do anything that Snide directed. Both had confidence in the misshapen little man, in spite of their continual grumbling at him.

"Do jist ez I tell yer, and nothin' else. D'ye understand, Kid?" whispered Snide.

Kid nodded.

"All right. Now come on."

The three men entered Flash o' Light's stall silently, and stood for a moment looking at Joe, as he lay on his cot, with the chloroform-saturated handkerchief upon his face.

"He's safe now. Away with you, and meet me at the old place to-morrow night," commanded Snide, pointing to a saddle and bridle hanging against the wall.

Kid took the trappings from their large nail, and gave the bridle to Wilk, keeping the saddle in his own hands.

The two men quickly adjusted the things on the horse, who, recognizing expert hands about him, allowed himself to be saddled and bridled with the docility that is generally to be found in a thoroughbred who does not inherit any bad traits from his ancestors.

Joe Morton stirred a little, but Snide, shifting the handkerchief so that the wettest part of it covered the young man's nostrils, soon sent him into an unconscious state again. He did not wish Joe to recognize him, even though he was powerless to prevent the theft of the steeple-chaser.

The buckhorn handle of the knife still protruded from the waistband of the detective, and as it caught the eye of Snide, he uttered an almost inaudible oath. He snatched it away and put it in his own pocket, holding the other knife, with its black handle, over the sleeper's heart.

"Pshaw! Why should I keer?" he muttered. "But it makes me mad, an' it puzzles me. I don't see how he got that thar knife."

The horse was saddled by this time, and Kid the Skipper, standing at its head, was looking at Snide Bill for instructions.

"Get on him!" commanded the groom, briefly.

Wilk moved as if he were about to obey the order, but Snide Bill impatiently jerked him aside.

"Not you—Kid!" he growled.

"Well, yer needn't knock a cove down," grumbled Wilk the Tough.

Kid the Skipper leaped lightly into the saddle, and Snide Bill took down a heavily-loaded riding-whip from a shelf and put it in Kid's hand.

"Use this hyar ef yer hev to. Onderstand?"

As Snide spoke, he touched the butt-end of the whip significantly, and Kid understood that it was to be used as an aggressive or defensive weapon if occasion arose, as well as a reminder to the horse.

"Open the door, Wilk."

The Cockney obeyed.

"Now, Kid, when yer once git outen this hyar place, ride gently. Yer want ter save him, so ez yer kin take it out uv him ef any one gits arter yer."

"Yes."

"Go straight down the avenue to Superior street, git over ther viaduck, and skeddaddle out Pearl street till yer git ter Brooklyn."

"Well?"

"Then take him ter ther old crib, an' keep him shady fer er while. Mind thet part uv it. Thar'll be er tremendous howl, an' it may not be safe fer me ter come fer some days. Take care uv him. Thar is feed up thar, I know."

"Wal, ye'd better give us a little more money, if we have ter stay up there with this durned hoss on our hands for a week or two," suggested Kid, looking calmly down from his saddle upon Snide's head.

"W'ot am I to do in this bizness?" demanded Wilk.

"You walk behind ther hoss, an' ef yer see anything thet looks suspicious, whistle. You'll

hev ter walk ter ther crib. Ef yer walk fast, yer oughter git thar almost ez soon ez Kid. Hyar's another twenty dollars. You hev ten dollars apiece already. Thet will be ez much ez you want. Thar's lots uv grub in ther house, ez wal ez feed fer ther hoss."

Joe Morton was moving again, but the handkerchief covered his face, and he had not energy enough to remove it. Snide saw this, and, as he had no more chloroform, he was anxious to get out of the stable with Flash o' Light before the young man overcame the effects of the dose enough to understand what was going on around him.

He took the bridle and led the horse out into the rain that was pouring down heavily and steadily. All was dark in the direction of the house, and Snide knew that even if there had been any one at the back windows (which was extremely unlikely at that hour in the morning), they could not have distinguished the light in the stable through the thick driving rain.

He did not mind the rain, and he did not trouble himself as to the opinions of Kid and Wilk. He led the horse along the gravel path till he got to the door leading from the lawn to the side lane by which access could be obtained to the alley, and thence around to the avenue.

"Now you understand, Kid, eh?"

"Yes."

"And you, Wilk?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose I'll 'ave to do what yer say," grumbled Wilk, who was anything but satisfied with his share in the adventure.

"I suppose so," responded Snide, coolly, looking at Wilk, in his favorite way, over his shoulder, as he led the horse through the gateway.

"That all, Snide?" asked Kid.

"Yes. I'll be with yer ez soon ez I kin," replied Snide. "Now, git!"

Without another word, Kid the Skipper twitched the bridle, and Flash o' Light obediently walked down the lane, Wilk the Tough at his heels.

"Wal, so much fer Flash o' Light," muttered Snide Bill as he saw the horse and the two men disappear in the rain. I'll make thet thar eight thousand dollars, an'—an'—how much more?"

He fell into a pleasing reverie for perhaps a minute, as visions of great profits from Flash o' Light's winnings under a different name arose in his mind. Then he realized that his position was not one of the safest for he did not know when a police officer might come strolling down the lane and make some awkward inquiries.

"It's all very well, so far, Snide, my boy, but yer ain't through with the job yet."

He hastily fastened the gate and went back to the stable, where he saw that Morton was rapidly recovering, but had not yet been able to remove the handkerchief.

"Now ter fix things so ez not ter hev them think I hed anything to do with it," he muttered.

"Leave the stable door a little way open. Yes, uv course. An'—yes, I'd forgotten thet—I must leave ther gate in the wall ther same way. Fellers c'ud easily climb over thet, an' they wouldn't be likely ter make it fast when once they had got through with ther job, not much."

Snide Bill was as quick in action as in thought. He ran out to the gate, opened its spring lock, removed the bar, and left it wide open.

"Thar, now it's plain enough which way they got out, anyhow, no one will think that Snide Bill hed er hand in it, especially when ther afore-said Bill wuz fast asleep on his virtuous couch."

He laughed silently as he reached the stable. Then the laugh changed to a snarl, and he flew to the cot upon which Joe Morton lay.

The handkerchief was nearly pulled from his face, but it still covered the young man's eyes. With a jerk, Snide replaced it, forcing it with some violence over the young man's nose and mouth, as well as over his eyes.

Then, seized by some unaccountable impulse, he took the detective by the throat, through the handkerchief, and raising the black-handled dirk, seemed as if he would plunge it into the helpless young man's heart and fairly cut out its secrets.

"Mose!"

The word was uttered in a ghostly voice that was, and yet was not, that of Joe.

As if an accusing spirit had spoken, Snide Bill dropped the knife upon the detective's breast, and then, with his head twisted a little more than usual, he ran from the stable in a perfect agony of superstitious terror.

Into the adjoining stable he hastened, closing and fastening the door with all the bolts and bars at his disposal and even pulling against it the heavy bench upon which Kid and Wilk had sat asleep an hour before.

Hardly had he done this, however, when the absurdity of his fears struck him so forcibly that he pulled the bench away again, and removed all the fastenings from the door save the spring lock.

Then he went quietly to the kitchen, looked around, and coming back to the stable, took off his clothes and lay down in a cot in a corner of the stable.

"It's all right," he thought. "Ther hoss is gone, an' no one will hev any idea ez I wuz mixed up in it. I kin do things up purty slick

when I hev to. Now, fer er little sleep. Thar ain't no use in me keepin' awake, I guess. I've done er hard night's work, an' ef everything goes right, I've done er good night's work, one ez'll pay me purty well."

Snide Bill here entered into a deep calculation of the amount he might secure provided he could enter Flash o' Light as a dark horse in some of the big races where the betting was heavy on the favorite. He had a pretty good head for figures, he considered, but his figures in this matter took so many fantastical turns and led him into such labyrinths of arithmetic that he dropped asleep in sheer self-defense.

It may be wondered that Snide Bill could go to sleep at all under such circumstances, but he had passed through too many adventures, and overcome too many dangers, to be troubled with insomnia when his schemes had worked as satisfactorily as in the present instance.

He slept peacefully as a child for he did not know how long, when he was awakened by a vigorous banging at the door, and the voice of Colonel Wright, crying, in stern tones.

"Bill! Bill!"

"All right, colonel. I'm coming," answered Snide, as with a sly smile, he jumped out of bed, and pulling on some of his clothes ran to the door and flung it open.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SECRET OF THE EMERALD.

A SMALL room in one of the side streets in that respectable, though, as a rule, not remarkably aristocratic district in Cleveland, of which Garden street and Woodland avenue are the principal arteries.

The house was a frame building, two stories high, unpretentious in style, and retiring in its general aspect. A garden in front, in which desolate shrubbery tried very hard to show green leaves each summer, and barely succeeded in doing so, kept passers-by from staring straight into the parlor windows. Not that there would have been much chance of seeing into the room, even without the garden, for there were thick, closely woven wire blinds inside the windows, reaching to within a foot of the top, which was absolutely opaque to those in the street, while allowing the inmates of the room to enjoy a dim view of anything that might be in progress in the outer world.

Five windows and one door were the only indications on the exterior that the house was intended for human occupation. Three windows up-stairs and two windows and a door down-stairs. All the windows, with their close wire blinds, looking like eyes that had been stricken blind from their birth. If there were any back doors or windows, no one in front could tell, for the house occupied the entire width of the lot, and therefore the rear was not approachable from the street. At the back of the house was a high board fence on the narrow alley, completely shutting out any view of the house at all from that point.

It was the night after the theft of the steeple-chaser, Flash o' Light, and the storm-clouds that hung over the city for the past forty-eight hours had become pretty well dispelled, giving the moon a chance to cast fantastic shadows upon the sidewalks, with their wealth of shade-trees.

The residence streets were beautiful on this summer evening, and on many of the high stone steps family groups were sitting chatting, in preference to staying indoors, no matter how luxurious might be the furnishings of the houses.

On the side street in which stood the modest frame house with its desolate shrubbery and five windows, the moon was playing hide-and-seek through the wire blinds as it dodged its way through the branches and leaves of a large silver maple at the edge of the sidewalk. It could not make the house look much duller than it usually did, but it was apparently trying very hard to do so.

The street was not a lively one at any time, but to-night it looked very miserable, perhaps in contrast to those surrounding, where the people were sitting at their doors, for on this street there was not a sign of human life to be seen.

A small cemetery faced the particular house with which we have to do, and the white tombstones flashing fitfully in the moonlight might easily have been mistaken for ghosts, without much strain upon the imagination.

On either side of the frame house were large brick mansions, the owners of which were away for the summer, in Europe or California, probably, and the servants left behind, if there were any, had gone to visit friends, to get away from the terrible dullness of this dead-and-alive side street.

The street was at its quietest, and the moon, apparently tired of its attempts to be playful with the frame house, had retired temporarily behind a large cloud that had not yet followed its brethren into nothingness, when a man appeared at the gate.

Where he had come from was a mystery. There had been no sound of footsteps upon the broad flagstones of the sidewalk, and, if there

had been any one on the watch, they would not have seen him walking toward the house.

"Now, to get at this old cuss," he muttered. "He has so many rules and regulations, that it is like getting out of jail to get into his place. Ah! Here it is."

The man was about thirty-five years of age, with a dark, forbidding countenance, to which a large black mustache lent still more fierceness. It was Leonard Thornton, known to the sporting world as Plunge.

He had found a small knob near the top hinge of the gate, and remembering, in a dim and uncertain way, certain directions that had been given him at some former time, he pressed the knob with his forefinger.

Silently the heavy gate swung wide open.

"Not such a bad scheme after all. Wonder what about the door?"

As he neared the door, which was in deep shadow, for the moon was still behind a cloud, the door opened, too, but not wide enough for him to enter.

He pushed it, but it was immovable. Then an idea struck him. Clinching his fist, he knocked twice and then rubbed his knuckles over the panel, making a scarcely-perceptible noise. Instantly the door swung wide open, and he entered the dark passage that led he could not tell where.

He stood for a moment uncertain what to do, when suddenly a blinding flash of light made him start, and then gave him an opportunity of examining his surroundings.

"Come in! Come in!" exclaimed a cheery voice. "Glad to see you. You are Mr. Leonard, I presume. Come in! You are on time, too. That's right, I like my customers to keep their word with me when they make appointments."

"Customers?"

"Yes. People that come on business like this of yours, I always speak of as customers to distinguish them from patients. I have different manners for the two classes, don't you see? When a man or woman comes here sick, with consumption or something of that kind, it would not do for me to laugh and talk lightly. They would think I did not sympathize with them, and my treatment would not have half the effect it has when I accompany it with a grave hope that they will feel better the next time I see them. Then if my treatment was not effective, I should find my practice running down, and that would not do, you know."

The speaker was a man in the prime of life—that is, not more than fifty. He had a long brown beard that he was fond of caressing as he talked, twinkling blue eyes, and a generally jolly aspect. He was stout, suggesting that he understood and appreciated good cookery, and he stood sturdily upon his feet, like a man who would stand a great deal of buffeting before he would cry, "Hold! enough!"

He was in the middle of a comfortably-furnished room in which a number of scientific appliances indicated that it was devoted to other uses besides mere idle occupation. In the center, upon an ordinary round, marble-top table, was a large glass bulb, behind which was a reflector. Plunge glanced but once at this bulb to understand how he stood in such a powerful shaft of light. The bulb was an incandescent electric burner, and the reflector turned its light full upon him.

The door had been suddenly opened, or the light had been turned on, he did not know which.

"Come in, Mr. Leonard, come in! I will shut the door."

Plunge obeyed. A man of strong nerve, he yet could not divest himself of the feeling that he was dealing with some one who might be first-cousin to the Prince of Darkness, notwithstanding his very earthly appearance and his cheerful manner. Plunge did not like his host's familiarity with electricity. It was beyond his comprehension, and he suspected everything that he did not understand.

However, he was here by his own arrangement, and he did not fear bodily harm, which was the main thing, after all, he told himself, as he resolved to take a practical view of the matter.

"Well, doctor, are you ready to examine this stone right away?"

"Certainly. It is all I intend to do to-night. I have had a steady stream of patients all day. You know I make a specialty of ear and throat diseases, and the thunderstorm this week has caused considerable trouble of that kind among the careless people of Cleveland. People will not take ordinary precautions, so they take cold, get decidedly sick, and then rush off to Doctor Fulton."

"You, eh?" observed Plunge, with a nervous little laugh, for he was thinking of something else.

"Yes, sir. Doctor Hezekiah Fulton, at your service. Oh, well, I shouldn't grumble. It's business, and even doctors must have money to buy bread and butter and pay rent, however much they may be wrapped up in science for its own sake. Ha, ha, ha!"

Dr. Fulton laughed apparently for the mere pleasure of laughing. He believed it was good

for the health, and he indulged in it on principle.

"Where is this stone?" he continued, setting back in a large, revolving easy-chair, and motioning his visitor to take one just in front of him.

Plunge looked around him cautiously, as if he feared there might be other witnesses besides the doctor.

"Don't be afraid. We are quite alone. There is nothing human in the house unless you count this."

As he spoke, he pointed to a closet near the door by which Plunge had entered, and through the partially displaced curtains that concealed it a skeleton could be dimly seen.

Plunge shuddered, for the grisly object took him by surprise. But he recovered himself at once, and, diving into an inside pocket, brought out the emerald brooch, carefully wrapped in a piece of newspaper.

He slowly removed the wrapping, and, at last held the jewel in his fingers before the doctor's eyes.

"Ay, ay! I have heard of this stone. I recognize it at once!" exclaimed the doctor, as his eyes sparkled with interest. "It is one of the jewels looted from Lucknow, at the downfall of Tipoo Sahib!"

"You don't say!" gasped Plunge, very much impressed by this learned remark of Dr. Fulton's.

"Yes; let me see it."

Dr. Fulton took the precious brooch, and turned it over and over in his hands in a sort of rapturous reverie. Then he took from the table at his elbow a small reflector fastened to an india-rubber band. He put the band around his head, so that the reflector lay flat upon his forehead. He next picked up a strong magnifying glass, and then—The light disappeared, and the room was in total darkness. Only for a second, however. Another electric light on a stand sprung into existence, and Plunge, who was somewhat mystified by Dr. Fulton's proceedings, understood them at last.

The reflector, catching the rays of the electric light, sent a very strong glare upon the emerald, so that the doctor, with the aid of his magnifying glass, could distinguish every mark and peculiarity in it, no matter how minute it might be.

Plunge sat watching the doctor without speaking, but his quick breathing and steady gaze told that he was deeply interested.

"Ah! What is this? By heavens! this is more important than I thought," muttered the doctor, apparently forgetting the presence of Plunge, as he turned the emerald slowly, and looked intently at it through the magnifier. "I see the mysterious letters that are spoken of in the records of the 'Seventh Book of the Crescent.' Then that story is not a myth, after all! Well, well!"

"What story, doctor?" asked Plunge, eagerly.

Dr. Fulton did not answer. He was still examining the emerald, and had no time to respond to insignificant queries. He walked quickly to a cabinet in a distant corner of the room, and unlocking a drawer with a small brass key, brought forth a vial containing about a tea-spoonful of dark-brown liquid. This he inspected closely with his magnifying glass and lamp, and then placing it on the table, applied a small steel implement to the brooch, and with a dexterous twitch, released the emerald from its setting.

He brushed aside the richly-chased gold and the diamonds as if they were utterly valueless, and took up the emerald in a pair of tweezers.

"What are you going to do, doctor?"

Plunge might have spared himself the trouble of asking the question, for he got no answer. The doctor, holding the emerald where the full force of the reflector would strike it, but without the magnifier, carefully uncorked the little bottle and poured a few drops upon the emerald. Then he replaced the cork and watched.

The stuff in the bottle, whatever it might be, possessed peculiar properties. Slowly the deep, translucent green of the stone changed before the eyes of the astonished Plunge into a dull, reddish-brown.

"Doctor?"

"Well?"

It was the first word that had issued from the lips of the physician since he had begun his examination of the jewel.

"Are you finding out anything?"

"Wait."

"I have been waiting, doctor."

"Wait a little longer."

"All right."

"Watch!"

The dull red of the stone became more and more pronounced, until, at last, the doctor, with a slight cry of triumph, noticed several white spots growing, as it were, through the dark color. Slowly the spots expanded and changed their shape, until at last they became letters—dim, certainly, but perfectly plain to the keen vision of Dr. Fulton. The letters spelled a word, but it was a word that apparently meant nothing—K. Q. O.

He called Plunge over to him and pointed to the jewel. In a few minutes, and with the aid

of the magnifying glass, the visitor managed to make out the letters. His sight was not as good as that of the doctor, notwithstanding that he was a younger man.

"I see K. Q. O., doctor, but what does it mean?"

"Wait!"

The doctor went to the cabinet, and, after putting his hands on it in one or two places, revealed a secret drawer, from which he drew a yellow book, or collection of papers of some curious material. It bore letters and inscriptions in the Hindoo tongue. Placing the emerald on the table by his side, the doctor pored over the manuscript, Plunge watching him intently.

"You have here a fortune in your hands. Do you know that?"

"A fortune?"

The eyes of Plunge Thornton sparkled.

"Yes. Here is the inscription of which the emerald gives the key. Without the letters the records here were meaningless to me. Now, with those letters the Seventh Book of the Crescent makes it all plain. The letters just supply the gaps."

"How?"

"You could not understand, if I were to try and explain. I have made a life study of Hindoo lore, and I tell you that that emerald is priceless—or was when it revealed its secret. Now that it has done so it can do no more."

"Is it not necessary for me to hold it to secure the fortune?"

"No."

"I am glad of it, because it is not mine," returned Plunge, with a grin. "But, what am I to do?"

"Come back to me to-morrow evening at this time, and I will tell you. In the mean time, if the emerald is not yours, I would advise you to return it to its owner."

"I will."

"Good. Give it to me and I will restore it to its original condition."

Plunge had been holding the jewel in his fingers. He gave it back to the doctor, who, placing it in a bath of some liquid that he took from a bottle on the table—evidently not as rare and precious as the brown stuff that had operated so strangely—soon restored the emerald to its original hue of translucent green. Then, with a few neat touches with his instruments, he put it back into its settings and handed it to Plunge.

The crook looked doubtfully at the jewel, but he could not see anything in it suggestive of the letters or the reddish-brown color that it had so lately borne.

"Good-night, Mr. Leonard. This time to-morrow evening!"

The doctor spoke in a matter-of-fact business-like way, as if, their business being ended, he desired the interview to close. At the same time he opened the door, and Plunge found the way to the street open to him, from the parlor door to the front gate.

"Good-night, doctor."

"Good-night."

Plunge Thornton was hardly in the street, with the gate and doors closed behind him, when the skeleton in the closet became violently agitated, while the curtains waved to and fro, as if the collection of bones was trying to walk into the room from his hiding-place.

Dr. Fulton glanced at the skeleton, but did not seem to be at all disturbed at its gruesome activity. He only smiled and said, quietly:

"Come! We are alone."

And from behind the skeleton stepped an individual, whose blonde curls and steel-blue eyes were as suggestive of vigorous life as the grinning skull and fleshless ribs were of death.

The individual walked up to the doctor and looked into his eyes.

"Well!" exclaimed the doctor.

"Well," was the response.

"Are you satisfied?"

"Quite."

"Good."

"We have trapped the scoundrel very comfortably, and moreover, I think we shall be able to upset certain little plans that are afloat for injuring the swiftest steeple-chaser of his day—Flash o' Light."

"I hope so. And you have my help."

"Thanks! I am sure of that."

The two men shook hands heartily, as the light fell full upon the face of the man who had come from behind the skeleton.

Jaunty Joe Morton, the Jockey Detective, stood revealed!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ROBBERS ROBBED.

WHEN the Skipper dashed away from the side-entrance to Colonel Wright's premises on the back of Flash o' Light, his chief object was to put as much distance between himself and that place as he could in as short a time as possible.

Flash o' Light was in good condition for a run, and he answered the pressure of his rider's knee and the touch of the whip upon his flank in a right good thoroughbred style that made the Skipper's heart bound in him. For if there was anything in the world that Kid the Skipper

appreciated, it was a good horse—and moreover, he knew one wherever he met it.

Wilk trotted along behind, his soft-soled shoes making but little noise. When a policeman hove in sight, Wilk dropped into a fairly rapid walk, but as soon as he had got away from the officer he broke into a run that soon brought him up with the horse again. Wilk had won too many walking and running matches not to be able to husband his strength and make a good showing in a long distance race.

Notwithstanding Snide's directions that the horse should be moved slowly at first, Kid was determined to put him along at a good pace. As for saving him, the man felt that Flash o' Light was good for any demands that might be made upon him, and he did not see the use of loafing along when he could just as well get to his destination quickly.

He had cleared the viaduct, and turning to the left, had entered upon a long, swinging canter along Pearl street, when, happening to think of Wilk, he cast his eyes to one side, and saw that worthy working himself along in the rain with a perseverance suggestive of a most saint-like determination to do his duty.

"Wilk!"

"Well, what d'ye want?"

"Come hyar."

Wilk shuffled through the mud and water until he stood at Flash o' Light's head, Kid having pulled up to allow his partner to reach him.

"Did yer notice any one a-follerin' us on the viaduck, just now?"

"No."

"Yer would ef ye'd looked."

"Should I?"

Wilk the Tough spoke with the utmost indifference. He was disgusted with his share of the expedition, because, as usual, he had been relegated to second place, and he did not care whether it proved successful or otherwise. He had only made up his mind to take care of himself, and if he saw any danger looming up ahead, to take refuge in flight. This, however, he did not confide to his companion.

"Thar wuz some one a-follerin' us on ther viaduck, an' I want ter know who it is."

"Do yer? Then, why don't you go back and see?"

"You go."

"I won't. I ain't no bloomin' lackey," replied the Tough, indignantly.

Kid the Skipper raised his whip as if he would bring it down on Wilk's head. In an instant the weapon was wrested from his hand, and Wilk, performing a sort of war-dance in the middle of the street, requested him to "git off that bloomin' 'oss and I'll break yer up into little bits in 'arf a minnit."

"Pshaw! I didn't mean nothin', Wilk. Come hyar and talk sensible," said Kid, the Skipper, controlling his temper with a desperate effort. "What's ther use uv yer gittin' mad so quick?"

"I ain't mad, but when a cove goes to 'it me with a bloomin' 'oss-whip, I ain't goin' to stand it. That's all, Kid."

"Hush! Look out! Hyar's somebody close behind us," whispered Kid, with a wary look over his shoulder.

"I don't care!" cried Wilk, defiantly. "I won't allow no cove to 'it me with a whip."

"Quite right, my dear—quite right," croaked a harsh voice in his very ear. "I wouldn't allow it, either. Don't let the Kid play no tricks on you."

"What the—" commenced Wilk, but the voice interrupted him.

"Don't make a noise, deary. It's late, and it don't sound well to have a disturbance in the street, especially when we are all friends."

Kid had sat stock still upon his horse, without uttering a word, but now he turned toward the new-comer, who was sitting in a light buggy, driving a long-legged chestnut horse that both men knew at a glance to be the favorite possession of Plunge Thornton.

"Wal, Dora, what's up?"

"I'll tell you. That's what I came for."

The old woman, already introduced to the reader as Dora, keeper of the boarding-house on the banks of Walworth Run, sat in the buggy, the cover of which was up, but did not shield her entirely from the rain, like a very ugly old witch, in the glare of an electric light that blazed at the corner of a street.

She had stolen quietly up to the two men, the noise of the rain preventing the sound of the light wheels and the dainty stepping of the chestnut horse from reaching their ears, and now glared upon them with a look in which triumph and vindictiveness were happily blended.

"Go on, Dora. If yer hev anything ter say, say it quick, fer we ain't got no time to stand here fooling with you nor no one else," said the Kid, impatiently.

"I want you to bring that horse down to the house, that's all," answered Dora, quietly.

"What for?"

"Never mind. Them's the orders."

"Whose orders?"

"Ther captain's."

"What—Plunge?"

"Yes."

"Oh, cricky! Here's a bloomin' lark. Won't Snide be in a pickle!" ejaculated Wilk.

"Say, Dora, you don't know what you're a-talkin' about," said Kid, the Skipper. "This ain't none of Plunge Thornton's business."

"Everything is his business when he wants to make it so. You ought to know that," retorted the old woman, angrily. "So just bring that horse right along."

"What horse?"

"Flash o' Light! The horse that you are riding. Do you think I don't know him? Here, Wilk, get in here. There ain't no use in your walkin' down to the run while I have the buggy here."

Wilk the Tough, perhaps rather glad to get away from the mud and water in which he was standing, obeyed at once.

"Now, Kid," she said.

"I don't know whether I'll go or not," replied the Skipper, sulkily.

"Oh, yes, you will."

"I will."

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"I do know!"

At the same instant the old woman leaned forward and thrust the muzzle of a huge revolver into his face, and Kid knew that she meant mischief.

"I'll go," he growled, sulkily.

"Of course you will, Kid, deary. Go ahead of me, over the viaduct again, and then down to the Flats. I'll keep behind you. Hurry now. There's a cop coming up that street opposite, and I don't suppose you want him to be asking you questions."

Kid did not reply, but he turned Flash o' Light in obedience to Dora's orders and trotted toward the viaduct, with the chestnut horse and the buggy immediately behind him. He gave Flash o' Light a vicious cut with his riding-whip, which Wilk had returned to him, and if the old woman could have read the workings of his mind she would have seen that he would be willing to wring her neck until it was as limp as that of a dead chicken. Very likely she could read it, but if she could she made no sign. She was satisfied with having gained her point, and she cared no more for Kid the Skipper's vindictiveness than she did for Wilk's enjoyment of the situation, which found vent in frequent repetitions of his favorite expression: "Oh, cricky, here's a lark!"

Kid rode on, wondering what would be the outcome of this new turn of affairs. He was compelled to disobey Snide Bill, at the order of Plunge Thornton, and yet he feared that the twisted-necked head groom would hardly excuse him for not taking Flash o' Light to Brooklyn Village, as he had been told to do. Kid did not understand the exact purpose of Bill in thus disposing of the horse, but he had a pretty well-defined idea that it was in opposition to Plunge. In that case, here was was the scheme going decidedly wrong. Kid did not like it, and he wished that he was well out of the whole business.

At last Kid pulled up before the closed door of the boarding-house in the retired portion of the Flats where traffic was an unknown quantity and where strangers seldom penetrated.

Dora was out of her buggy in an instant. She was as agile as a girl, and, as some of her boarders had ere this discovered, as strong as many a man.

She briefly commanded Wilk to get out too, and then told him to take the chestnut horse to the stable.

"Now, Kid, for that horse of yours. We'll take him below, out of harm's way."

"Yes, I suppose so," grunted Kid.

Opening the door with her pass-key Dora went into the dark hallway leading to the kitchen, and Kid, without dismounting, followed. Flash o' Light's iron-shod feet made a tremendous rattling upon the wooden flooring, but the noise did not seem to disturb any of the other inmates of the house—provided there were other inmates.

To the end of the hallway in the dark, passing the door of the kitchen on the right, and then Dora opened another door from which issued a smell of stables. A sloping platform ended in a large stable extending all under the house.

This was revealed when the old woman lighted a gas jet, as she did as soon as she and Kid and the horse were all in the room.

"Now, just put Flash o' Light in that corner, bed him down, give him some feed and leave him," commanded Dora.

Kid obeyed with the air of one doing a very unpleasant job under protest and then looked at her for further orders.

She motioned him to follow her, and proceeded to the kitchen, which was opened for her by a very sleepy youth with a sandy, bullet head, no eyelashes to speak of, and a very thin, piping voice. He had been kept awake to mind the door while Dora had been absent, and he seemed very glad that she was home again.

"Do you want me any more?" he piped.

"No, Pete, I guess not. Anybody been here?"

"No, Dora. It's been the dullest night I ever see. I guess I'll go to bed."

"Yes. Good-night."

"Good-night."

Pete disappeared into the bar-room, from whence he made his way to some mysterious apartment where he could dream away the next eight or ten hours in blissful unconsciousness.

A moment later Wilk the Tough presented himself, and gruffly announced that the chestnut horse and the buggy were all right in their stable.

"Now, what are you going to do with the Flash, Dora?" asked Kid.

"That will depend upon the captain."

"Oh."

Kid the Skipper saw that Dora was not disposed to give any information about Plunge Thornton's intentions, and he wisely saved his breath by not asking any more questions.

"Do you want some coffee?" asked Dora, after a pause, during which the two men had been huddling close to the stove, till the steam from their wet garments enveloped them in a thick cloud.

"Do we want some coffee?" repeated Wilk, ironically. "Do we want some coffee? Why, I'm so bloomin' tired and wet and 'ungry and thursty, that I could drink a pailful of coffee. Dish it up, Dora, if yer 'ave any without any ceremony. Do we want some coffee? Gosh!"

Wilk's feelings here overcome him to such an extent that he had to get up and kick himself.

Dora had not waited for the end of the Tough's peroration. She was already putting the coffee on to boil, and in about a quarter of an hour she put two large bowls of the fragrant beverage before Kid and Tough, flanked by a big loaf of bread, and a cold roast of beef.

"Say, Tough, this kinder pays us for all our work, don't it?" said Kid, in the exuberance of his satisfaction with his meal.

"Oh, I don't know. It may pay you, 'cause you've 'ad all the fun, but it ain't been so much of a bloomin' lark for me, don't you know," answered Wilk, who was disposed to be dissatisfied with everything to-night.

"Through?" asked Dora, briefly, after a while, when she saw that the two men were resting from their labors of eating and drinking.

"Yes," answered Kid.

"Speak for yourself, Kid, will yer?" put in Wilk. "I ain't 'ad enough yet. I want some more coffee and sandwiches afore I am through, Dora."

"Do you? Well, you won't get 'em. You've had more than enough for any decent man. I don't propose to let any one make a hog of himself in my boarding-house."

Dora showed that she meant what she said by hastily clearing away all the cups and dishes, and leaving the table bare.

"Now, lie down there, and get some sleep. There will be work for you to do when the captain comes, I guess. You will not be bothered for a few hours, so make the most of them."

With these words Dora disappeared into the bar-room, while Kid and Wilk, taking her advice, stretched themselves on either side of the stove, and for the second time since darkness set in, dropped fast asleep.

Dora poked about among her bottles and other paraphernalia of the bar-room in a mechanical way for perhaps an hour. Then she appeared to think of something, for, opening a small trap-door immediately under the bar, behind the counter, she went down a steep flight of steps, and traversing a small hall, opened a door and found herself in the stable in which Flash o' Light had been put two hours before.

One look around, and she rushed through the doorway up the steps to the bar-room, and from thence to the kitchen in which Kid and Wilk lay sleeping. She gave each of them a vigorous kick that restored them to their waking senses at once.

"What the bloomin' thunder is the matter?" howled Wilk the Tough, while Kid looked at her in silent amazement, and some disgust.

"Some one has stolen the horse, without unfastening any of the doors!" gasped the old woman.

CHAPTER XV.

FLASH IN SAFE HANDS AGAIN.

PERHAPS before we explain how Joe Morton came to be hiding behind the skeleton in Dr. Hezekiah Fulton's office, we had better trace the events of the night before, in Colonel Wright's stables when Flash o' Light was stolen by Snide Bill and his companions.

When the head groom opened the stable door in response to the hammering of Colonel Wright, he did so with the expectation of being overwhelmed with questions, as to the whereabouts of Flash o' Light. To his intense surprise there was no excitement in either the appearance or language of his employer.

It was broad daylight, and though the atmosphere was heavy, and the driving clouds overhead promised more rain, there was none falling now.

"Well, colonel?"

"You sleep late, Bill. I want you to harness up the roan to my light buggy. I have to drive several miles. Is he in good shape?"

"All right, colonel. His feet are splendid."

"Good. How is the Flash? I haven't time to go in to him. Joe has the door fastened, and it will take me too long to stir him up. I suppose he is sleeping late, too. Hurry up, with that buggy."

"All right, colonel."

Snide Bill, with considerable bustle, brought the buggy forward from its corner and hitched up the roan to it, looking warily at his employer over his left shoulder the while, as his custom was. He did not quite know what to make of things so far.

As soon as the buggy was ready Colonel Wright seated himself in it and drove out of the side gate without another word, leaving Snide Bill looking after him with a blank stare of astonishment.

"That thar's the funniest snap I ever heerd of," he muttered. "He don't seem to bother himself 'bout ther Flash no more than ef he never had sich er hoss. Wal, it's er mighty good job fer me, anyhow. But I've got ter find out what's goin' on next door hyar, an' I guess I'll pay a mornin' visit to 'em."

He accordingly knocked at the door with all his force. No answer. He knocked again and again, but each time without any response.

"Strange! I can't hev killed that thar Joe, surely I dunno either. It's queer. I—I—"

Snide Bill's broken nose twitched in agitation as this thought crossed his mind, and it was with rather more than his usual haste that he rattled the door, and bawled through the keyhole: "Joel Mosel Joel!"

But neither of the owners of the names answered.

"This is er durned funny break fer them fellers ter make. Wonder ef thar ain't some place in ther wall whar I kin see in thar."

Soon as he spoke he remembered a hole in the wall that he had noticed in a dreamy sort of way while he was holding the handkerchief over Joe Morton's face. It was the same hole through which the detective had watched the amiable Bill and his companions Kid and Wilk when they were talking over the affair of the emerald and the swag that they intended to divide, but which, as we know, was confiscated by Morton before the thieves were able to arrange their business satisfactorily.

One glance through the hole, and then Snide Bill stepped back, struck the wall emphatically with his fist, and growled: "Gone, ther hull b'ilin' uv 'em—hoss, Joe and Mose."

He went back to his work in the stable with his three horses, and never left them all day. For once, he was completely at a loss what to do. He knew it would hardly be safe for him to go to Brooklyn village to see Flash o' Light, for he felt convinced that he was suspected by some one—the more so because no one had suspected him openly. He felt as if he was over a mine, that might explode at any moment. He would have felt more comfortable if the colonel had asked him something about it, or if Joe and Mose had made some sign. As it was, the very inactivity of everybody filled him with a nameless dread, and he was about as uncomfortable as it was possible for a twisted-necked groom to be.

Where was Mose? That will be revealed further along.

And Colonel Wright? Why did he hasten away early in the morning?

He drove briskly along in the damp air of the morning, not seeming to feel any inconvenience and apparently only anxious to cover the distance that he had to traverse in as short a time as possible.

He struck into a country road after a while, and at last, after passing through one or two villages, whose streets were overshadowed by the broad leaves of maples and horse-chestnuts, from which the rain-drops pattered down in gusts as the wind shook them, at length reached an open expanse of fields amid which a long whitewashed fence and a row of white wooden sheds gave token that a stable and driving-track were there.

It was not that of Captain Wood, however, as the reader may have been led to suppose. It was a dozen miles at least from the domain of the owner of Loafer, and Colonel Wright would have been just as well pleased to know that it was twice twelve miles away, for he had no desire at present that the captain should know anything about Flash o' Light, if possible.

These stables were the famous headquarters of the firm of Thornton & Co. The "Co." was a polite fiction, for every horseman in the country knew that Plunge Thornton was the sole manager of the business, as well as its proprietor.

"Good-morning," said the colonel, as having driven inside the inclosure, he leaped from the buggy, glad of the opportunity of stretching his limbs by walking up and down.

Plunge Thornton, with his hands in his pockets, was standing at the head of a horse clothed from nose to tail in bright scarlet blankets and hood, even his legs being swathed in bandages

of the same color, fastened at the back with straps and buckles.

He looked up carelessly as Colonel Wright spoke and nodded in reply, without speaking. He did not believe in making himself too cheap.

"What about Flash o' Light?" continued the colonel. "I expected you would have been at my place last night."

"Couldn't do it, colonel, I was busy."

"You insist that Flash must be brought here?"

"Certainly. I couldn't go to your place, and neglect everything here," answered Plunge Thornton carelessly, though he was watching every movement of the colonel's features, to note what effect his words had upon him.

"Well, will you send up for the horse?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"To-day."

"Very well. I will stay here until he comes. There is something to eat, drink and smoke in the neighborhood, I suppose?"

"Yes, the boys here manage to live very comfortably if you don't mind having things plain."

"Not at all," continued the colonel cheerfully, as he turned to walk toward a shanty at the end of the row of stables, from the roof of which a piece of stove-pipe was protruding and smoking away in a very business-like style.

"Colonel, I done been lookin' for you, sah!"

It was the voice of Mose Lloyd, and that gentleman stood at the colonel's elbow looking up breathlessly and excitedly into his employer's face.

"Been looking for me? And why have you been looking for me? Where do you come from?"

The colonel spoke sharply, as his custom was when interested, and Mose wilted as if he had been struck with a base-ball bat.

"I—I come from Cleveland, sah! Mister Mawton, sah!"

"Well, well?" interrupted the colonel, impatiently.

"He done tole me ter find yer, an' he said he thought you done gwine ter come hyar, an' he tole me to come too, to tell you, sah—"

"What?"

The monosyllable was so sharply flung at him that poor Mose wilted again, and his eyeballs rolled awfully in his agony of spirit. He could not speak for half a minute, but recovered his voice at last!

"Mr. Mawton, sah! He tole me to tell you, sah, dat—dat—dat—"

"You thundering fool! What's the matter with you?" put in Plunge, who had been regarding the boy's agitation with the deepest disgust.

"Go on, Mose, tell us what's the matter," said the colonel, taking pity on him.

"Well, sah— Flash o' Light—"

"Yes, yes!" interrupted the colonel, as much excited in a minute as Mose himself.

"Flash o' Light has been stole, sah."

Mose was not given a chance to say more, for Colonel Wright, scarcely knowing what he did, seized the frightened boy by the shoulders and shook him till his great white teeth rattled and his eyes seemed about to start from their sockets.

"Stolen?" gasped the colonel, at last, as he held Mose at arm's length and glared upon him fearfully.

"Yes, sah."

"When?"

"Dunno, zackly. Some time in de night, I guess."

"Some time in the night? Why didn't you tell me before? What do you mean?"

Another shake, and poor Mose lost the last idea he possessed as to the why or the wherefore of anything.

"If I were you, colonel, I'd have that fellow arrested," observed Plunge, his sinister countenance wearing a frown that did not improve his appearance in the least.

"Why?" asked the colonel, sharply.

"Well, that's what I should do, if I were you," returned Plunge, with a dogged shake of the head.

"But you have a reason for your advice, I suppose?"

"I suppose I have."

"What is it?"

"Well, I believe he knows where the horse is."

"Think he stole it, eh?"

"Yes."

Colonel Wright looked at Plunge as if he would like to wring his neck, and perhaps he would if something had not happened that changed the current of his thoughts most agreeably.

There was a rattle of hoofs at the gate of the inclosure, and ere any of the two could speak another word, Joe Morton dashed up on the back of Flash o' Light!

If Colonel Wright and Joe Thornton were surprised, what shall be said of Mose Lloyd's state of mind? He could hardly believe his eyes, and he had to pass his hand all over the horse and up and down Joe Morton's right leg a dozen times before he could realize what he saw. At

that he drew a long breath, and looking around at his employer with a grin the whole width of his face, ejaculated simply:

"Golly!"

The colonel began to ply the young man with questions, but the answer given in one terse sentence was:

"The horse is all right, colonel. I will tell you all about it at some future time."

Plunge Thornton was used to hiding his feelings, and although he was burning with curiosity, he did not speak when Joe Morton, springing lightly from the saddle, put the steeple-chaser's bridle in his hand, as if to formally resign him to his new trainer.

"There he is, Plunge. I depend upon you to put him in such shape that the steeple-chase will be a sure thing for us," said the colonel.

"I will do what I can, Colonel Wright."

Plunge Thornton was too cautious a man to commit himself, especially when, as we know, he had made up his mind that Flash o' Light should not be the first horse past the winning-post in the great contest.

"I should like you to keep Morton and Mose here while the horse is in training. They will be useful to you, because they know his little ways very well. You have no objection, I suppose?"

"Well, colonel," answered Plunge, slowly, "I have my own men here, and I do not care to be bothered with outsiders, especially when they are likely to interfere."

"Morton will not interfere any more than Mose will. They will both be under your orders."

Plunge was stroking Flash o' Light more gently, but the look he shot at the detective was that of a murderer. He did not reply for a few seconds. Then he said:

"If you say so, colonel, they can stop here, but Mr. Morton will have to work hard, and he will have to take his chances of bed and board with the rest of the boys."

"He is willing to do that," observed the colonel.

"Better let him speak for himself, hadn't you?" suggested Plunge, with something like a sneer.

"If I didn't agree with the colonel, I should speak," was the detective's quiet remark.

"And Mose? What about him?" asked the colonel.

"There are two or three colored boys among my gang. He can go in with them."

"Very well, then. That is settled. Now, what are you going to do with Flash this morning? I should like to see the beginning of his treatment."

"The first thing is to look him over," returned Plunger, as he led the steeple-chaser into the stable, and commanded Mose to take off the cloths.

The boy obeyed with alacrity, for he was pleased to be at work around Flash once more, to say nothing of his anxiety to see how the animal looked.

"Fit as a fiddle!" he exclaimed rapturously, as the sleek, shining black coat of the racer was revealed in the half-light of the stable.

Joe Morton was about to make some remark, when the doorway was suddenly darkened by some person standing in it, and a voice that Plunge recognized as Kid the Skipper's exclaimed mechanically:

"Thar's ther hoss, by thunder!"

Then he was pushed forward until he fell literally into Colonel Wright's arms, and Wilk the Tough stepped inside with a growl:

"Make room fer a cove, carn't yer?"

CHAPTER XVI.

NEW QUARTERS FOR FLASH.

"I BEG yer pardon, colonel! This hyar durned fool is allers er-tumblin' over some one!" exclaimed Kid the Skipper apologetically, as he recovered himself.

"Who are you callin' a fool, you bloomin' codger. I'll have that mill with you right here. I don't care who is about."

Without more ado, Wilk the Tough, whose anger had been at the boiling-point for two days, squared his elbows and threw himself into the most approved attitude of self-defense, dancing around Kid the Skipper with an agility that would do credit to that hero himself.

The Kid hesitated for a few seconds, as he looked at Plunge doubtfully, but a stinging blow on the forehead from Wilk's right fist, followed by another on the chin, that made his teeth rattle like castanets, from his left, warmed him up into action, and before Colonel Wright realized what was going on, the two lightweight champions were in the midst of a hammer-and-tongs sparring-match that would have thrown a Bowery dive audience into ecstasies.

The fight did not last long, however.

Plunge Thornton, who seemed to be possessed of almost herculean strength, seized the combatants each by the back of his neck, and pulled them apart as if they had been two kittens.

"What do you mean by this?" he demanded.

"Hang me if I haven't a good mind to knock out the little brains you have against the door-post."

Plunge looked as if he meant it, and Kid, who had more self-control than his antagonist, broke away from the grasp of the angry trainer, and walked quietly away to the end of the stable. Wilk required to be shaken a little before he was subdued, but he was brought to his senses at last, and then he leaned against the doorway, gasping for breath, but still ready to resume the contest at any moment.

Colonel Wright recognized Kid and Wilk as the gentlemen who had been introduced by Snide Bill as his friends, in the Euclid avenue stable, but he did not trouble himself to renew the acquaintanceship. He supposed that they were hangers-on of Thornton's stable, and he took no more notice of them than he would of any other hirelings with whom he had no personal connection.

"Git!" commanded Plunge, with a threatening look that the two intruders knew must not be disregarded.

"Where shall we go?" asked the Kid, moving toward the doorway, but keeping a watchful eye on Wilk the while, to make sure that he did not recommence hostilities.

"Down to the shanty, both of you. I will be with you later on. Do you understand?"

It was evident that Kid and Wilk did understand, for they disappeared through the doorway without another word, walking on toward the shanty at the end of the row of stables with one accord, but without speaking to each other. Conversation between them would be likely to result in more fighting in the present state of their tempers.

"What do you think of the horse, Plunge? You have not any doubt about his winning this event in the fall, have you?"

"He is pretty well, colonel, but I do not care to say whether he will win or not. There is a good one not many miles from here, you must remember—Captain Wood's Loafer."

"Ah, yes. A big horse of some promise, I believe, but I understand that he has no chance with Flash o' Light. I am told so by people that have seen both horses."

"Mustn't be too sure, colonel. The most uncertain thing in the world is the way a steeple-chaser will turn out. You see, there are so many chances of accidents, that it is not always the best that comes in first over a stiff course."

"True," answered the colonel, thoughtfully. "True. Of course I take all those chances; but I think that, with Flash o' Light trained to the limit, with a clever jockey on his back, he should be able to show a clean pair of heels to Loafer."

"Provided the Flash is not fixed in any way," put in the detective, quietly.

Plunge Thornton turned suddenly and looked into the young man's face with sinister keenness. Joe Morton returned the look innocently, but notwithstanding its apparent carelessness, the glance was as sharp as that of the trainer.

The two men felt from that moment that they were enemies, and each was studying the other from a foeman's standpoint.

"What do you mean by that?" growled Plunge.

"I mean that Flash o' Light will win unless he meets with an accident, or is the victim of treachery," replied Joe.

"I guess there is not any treachery around my stable. I always look after my horses myself, and I can trust all my helpers."

"Yes, yes; of course, Plunge," hastily interrupted the colonel, who did not wish the two men to quarrel just now. "We know that. Joe Morton only spoke in a general way."

Plunge did not reply. He took the cloth with which Mose had been rubbing down Flash out of the boy's hand, and applied it skillfully to the sleek hide of the racer with the care of a man who understood his work well.

The noble animal seemed to be proud of his own appearance, for he arched his beautiful neck and looked around upon his human companions as if challenging them to produce a handsomer specimen of his race than himself.

"He is to have this place alone, I suppose?" asked the colonel, looking around the roomy stable approvingly.

"Yes."

"Never without some one to watch him, of course. I should think Mose, here, or Joe Morton would be the best to leave with him at night."

"Colonel Wright, you put Flash o' Light in my hands to train him for this steeple-chase, don't you?" asked Plunge Thornton, abruptly.

"Yes."

"Very well. Then I must make my own arrangements. I am answerable to you for the condition of Flash when the time comes for him to enter the race. I do not object to these two people from your stable being here, but I must say who will be kept in the horse's stable and who will stay out."

The colonel looked for a moment as if he would resent this independent attitude of the trainer. But he saw, or thought he saw, that the dictum was reasonable, and, with a shrug of acquiescence, he turned away, to get into his buggy and drive off.

As he stepped out of the doorway and stood for a moment at the head of the roan to whisper

a soothing word, Joe Morton passed him as he adjusted a buckle in the harness.

"It is all right, colonel; I will watch," whispered the detective, cautiously, for he knew that Plunge Thornton's senses were keen, and that he suspected everybody, himself in particular.

"Very well, Joe, I trust you. He is the best man for a trainer that I could get—if he is honest," responded the colonel.

Plunge Thornton came up at this moment, and the colonel, taking his seat in the buggy, waved his hand to the three—Plunge, Joe and Mose—and drove out of the gateway without looking back.

Joe Morton walked into Flash's stable and patted the horse's neck.

"Here. What are you doing? When I want you to touch that horse I will tell you. Just come out of that stable."

It was Thornton who spoke, and his accents were anything but conciliatory. Joe Morton quietly obeyed and stood outside the stable door waiting for further orders.

"You brought the horse here. Where did you get him?" asked the trainer. "The coon there said he had been stolen. How did you come by him?"

"Yes, 'ow did you find 'im?" added another voice, as Wilk the Tough swaggered up.

The detective turned toward Wilk and answered, with a careless smile. "I found him down on the Flats in Cleveland, near the place where I disturbed some gentlemen dividing a swag of sealskin."

Wilk's countenance fell. He turned on his heel and walked into the shanty without another word. He had a general idea that this easy-going young man with the steel-blue eyes was a near relative of the devil, and now he was almost inclined to believe him his Satanic Majesty himself.

As for Plunge Thornton, he made up his mind to keep his eye on this young man who knew too much, and who might turn out to be dangerous.

Joe followed Wilk into the shanty and looked around him. There were half a dozen grooms sitting at a rough table eating steak that they had cooked themselves on the old stove in the corner, and Kid, who was a handy fellow, was pouring out hot coffee into the queerest collection of chipped old coffee-cups that Morton had ever seen, notwithstanding that his experience of men and things was somewhat extensive.

The detective took a seat by the stove, and a pale-faced youth near him invited him to the table and put a portion of the steak in a dish into a plate for the new-comer. Morton took the meat with thanks, and his appetite having been but little impaired by the chloroform, although he had been very sick at first, did justice to the meal, which he washed down with two cups of coffee handed to him by Kid the Skipper.

After the meal he strolled out into the grounds, watching the speeding of some of the trotters around the race track, and helping about the stables with the rest of the men.

He was never allowed to go into Flash o' Light's stable, however. Once or twice, when he walked in that direction, he met Plunge Thornton, who curtly gave him orders to do something that would remove him as far as possible from the place in which Colonel Wright's steeple-chaser stood.

This stable was near the gate of the inclosure, and isolated to a degree from all the other stalls, and it was evident that Plunge Thornton did indeed mean to carry on the training of Flash under his own immediate supervision, undisturbed by any interference on the part of other people.

Thus the day passed away, until, when all the horses except Flash o' Light had had a spin on the track, they were made comfortable for the night, each with his particular watcher, for whom there was a cot-bed in his stable, sitting at the door or standing just outside, talking to his fellow grooms. Then Morton saw that Mose Lloyd—whom he had missed since the departure of the colonel, and who had, in fact, been kept in Flash's stable all day, where he could not communicate with Joe, save for a few minutes at each meal-time, when he had been allowed to go into a shanty set apart for the colored boys, which was a few yards from the white men's place—was to be Flash's watcher.

To make sure that Mose would stay in the stable, Plunge Thornton obligingly turned a key in the door, thus making both boy and horse prisoners till he should see fit to release them.

"You can do as you like for the rest of the night," observed Plunge Thornton, carelessly, as he drove out of the inclosure with his long-legged chestnut horse and his light buggy. "Perhaps you have some of your duds to bring down from Cleveland. If you have, I should advise you to get them to-night."

"Thanks. Which is the best way to get to the city?"

"You can walk three miles to the street-cars at Brooklyn Village, and go in that way. Or—if you like, you can ride with me. I am going in."

The offer was rather grudgingly given, but Joe, who had his own reasons for wanting to get into the city, accepted the invitation without taking any notice of the hesitation of the trainer.

"Get up!" growled Plunge, as he gave his long-legged chestnut a cut with the whip.

The horse reared and kicked, but his driver, who, as we know already, rather liked a struggle with his horse, soon sawed and whipped him into obedience, and drove him out of the gate at a spanking pace.

So fast and heedlessly did he drive that the fences in the country roads along which they passed whizzed by as if bewitched, and the occasional pedestrians they met in the dusty roadway jumped out of the way with ludicrous haste as they saw the wild-looking horse, guided by the evil-faced man, tearing down upon them like a thundercloud.

"This is Brooklyn Village," announced Plunge, as, skirting a patch of thick wood, the buggy rattled over the rough, hard clods of an unpaved street, with white frame houses standing back from the road, each in its own spacious yard.

"Is it?" said Joe, quietly, though he could hardly help smiling at the idea of the trainer giving him information about Cleveland or its suburbs. "Hallo! What's this?" he added, with rather more excitement, as he felt a pair of hands clasped around his neck from behind, while the hot breath of some animal (human or otherwise, he could not tell which), whistled about his ears.

It was the work of a moment for the detective to throw off the grasp of his assailant. Then, as the trainer pulled up the chestnut horse, they both looked over the back of the buggy, and saw, lying in a heap in the dust of the road, no less a person than the head groom at Colonel Wright's stables—Snide Bill.

CHAPTER XVII.

PLUNGE TELLS HIS LOVE.

WHEN Plunge Thornton left the office of Dr. Hezekiah Fulton he walked aimlessly along the streets for an hour, without thinking particularly of where he was going. He was so much taken up with the revelation of the doctor that he cared nothing whether his steps might lead him.

It was thus, then, either by chance, or at the instigation of some power that he did not understand, that he walked toward Euclid avenue, and that part of it in which the mansion of Colonel Wright was situated.

His mind was on the emerald and the strange story that the doctor had just now half-revealed, and since the solving of the mystery of the jewel was nearly concerned with the colonel and his family, it was no wonder that his steps should unconsciously have turned toward their house.

"So! The secret is in the hands of the doctor now, eh?" he mused. "And it will be mine tomorrow. And it means two fortunes! Ah! My proud gentleman! Once let me get the benefit of that secret, and I will see whether Leonard Thornton isn't a man you will be proud to have for a son-in-law. It is the one thing I want that I have not been able to turn my way at first; but I will do it—I will do it, just as sure as—*Flash o' Light will lose that race!*"

As his thoughts reached this point he found that he had strolled to the front of Colonel Wright's residence. It was late—past eleven o'clock—but he saw a light in the window that he knew belonged to the colonel, and he walked up the gravel path without hesitation, and knocked at the door.

The evening was warm, and as he knocked, the door, swinging easily upon its hinges, opened a little way, and gave him a view of the room—the colonel's library, which has been already described.

The desk was wide open, as usual, and some one was sitting at it writing. It was not Colonel Wright, however, who had taken possession of his room, held sacred from all the household but one person. It was just that one privileged person who was at it—Ada Wright.

She was so deeply engaged in the letter she was writing that she had not heard the knock at the door, nor had she noticed that it was pushed open.

She presented a beautiful picture as she sat thus intent upon her letter. The red gleam of the light through a paper shade that hung around the lamp globe gave her golden hair a delicate tinge that made it a veritable halo of glory around her fair young face. She wore a light filmy lace dress, as her custom was in the summer, and the place at her neck in which the emerald brooch used to gleam was now ornamented with a large diamond solitaire.

It was easy to see that the note she was writing was of a pleasant character, while the quick breathing, and the nervous way in which she occasionally pushed back her golden tresses indicated that she was worried over it, too, for some reason.

"Wonder what she is writing?" muttered Plunge, as he stepped softly into the room.

His curiosity to look at her letter overcome

his prudence, for he would have known that it was a dangerous proceeding to force his way into the house of a wealthy citizen at midnight, however well he might know the people in the house.

Softly he crept nearer and nearer to the girl until he leaned over her and glanced at the top of the letter.

"Dear —," he commenced to himself, as he read the name. Then his eyes blazed with fury, and he looked at the girl for a moment with an expression of hatred that would have made her tremble had she seen it.

But she was bending over her letter, writing the last few words: "Always thine, Ada."

"Curse him!"

The imprecation was inaudible, but it was as deep and vindictive as if it had been uttered in thunder tones. It was the outburst of a jealous heart that sees its rival elevated without effort to the place it would give life itself to occupy.

Plunge Leonard had just discovered for the first time, that in his determination to win Ada Wright for his bride, he had overlooked one contingency that he had considered out of the question altogether whenever it presented itself momentarily to his thoughts—that the girl might have another and a favored lover.

Having finished the letter, Ada carefully folded it and looking up to the pigeon-hole before her for an envelope—*saw Plunge Thornton.*

She did not scream, because she was not in the habit of expressing her fears in that way, but she sat and stared into the small mirror before her by means of which she had been made aware of the trainer's presence, with a blank look of terror that he understood at once.

Their eyes had met in the mirror.

For a few seconds that seemed like hours of agony to the girl they thus gazed at each other. Then Thornton suddenly drew back so as to be out of sight of Ada in the mirror and spoke to her:

"Miss Ada!"

The spell was broken. Like a flash she had swung around in the large office-chair, and with her left hand on the bottom of an electric gong, sat facing him with nothing but indignation expressed in her beautiful face.

"Who are you, sir, and what are you doing here?" she demanded.

A curious smile stole over the dark countenance of the man.

"My name is Leonard Thornton, and I came here to see Colonel Wright about the horse, *Flash o' Light.*"

The contemptuous glance she bestowed upon him told him plainly as words that she knew he lied.

He took the glance as if it had indeed been a speech, and replied to it:

"Of course, while I desire to see your father, Miss Ada, I need not say that I have another object in coming here at this time.

"You need not have told me. I knew it."

"Exactly; you remember that we met once or twice last summer, at Sheepshead Bay, where your father took you to see the races?"

"I know that my father had some business with you at that time, and that incidentally he told me who you were."

"Introduced us, in fact eh?" insinuated Plunge, with a grin.

"You appeared to think it was an introduction and presumed on it to address your conversation to me. Yes, I remember that."

"How beautiful she looks when she is mad, and she is certainly mad now," thought the trainer, as he watched the color come and go in the transparent cheeks.

The girl certainly deserved the admiration of her visitor, although she had no desire to provoke it. The timid, shrinking girl had emerged into the indignant woman, and the Ada Wright that now looked so defiantly at this man who had intruded upon her privacy was hardly recognizable as the same young girl who was such a pet of her father's that he would not trust her upon the streets alone even in the busy afternoon shopping hours when thousands of her own sex and class would be around her.

"Now, Mr.—Mr.—Thornton, if you desire to see my father I will call him."

She lifted her hand to strike the electric button, which was arranged on the desk before her, but ere she could carry out her intention, Plunge had darted forward and grasped her wrist.

"Hold!" he hissed.

"Why?"

"Because I have something to say to you, and I want to say it to you alone."

He released her wrist and stood back, satisfied that she would obey him, while she, looking at the blue marks on her white flesh, where his fingers had grasped her arm, waited for him to go on. Somehow, she had a mysterious fear of this man, for which she could not account, but which held her in a grasp of iron.

"Tell me quickly what you have to say, and then I will call my father."

"I will tell you in three words: *I love you!*"

As if a snake had struck, her the girl shrunk back, turning the chair with her quick movement, so that her face was away from her companion.

She felt as if she could not bear him to look at her—as if there was shame in his very presence. He stood still, regarding her with the sneer, that his face had worn throughout the interview, intensified. He understood exactly the effect his avowal had had upon her, and though it cut him to the very soul, it also aroused a spirit of resentment within him that would have allowed him to kill her where she sat, without the slightest remorse.

"You are rather surprised at this, perhaps," he went on. "You thought that a man whose life is passed among horses, who has no particular standing in society except such as comes from giving every one a square deal, had nothing to do with love, and did not know the meaning of the word, eh?"

She did not answer, but her face told him that he had described her opinions exactly.

"Yes, you cannot understand that Leonard Thornton is in love with you, and would go through anything to be able to tell you so with his arms around your waist, and his face close to yours."

The girl shuddered. Plunge shrugged his shoulders and went on coolly:

"Yes, you do not like the idea now, of course. But wait a while, and the time will come when you will listen to my tale in just that way."

"Is that all you have to say?" she asked, coldly:

"No, not all. I want to tell you this: I see you are writing a letter there to a man whom I can crush with one blow of my fist; whom I can place under my heel, and hold there if I am so inclined; whom I will not allow to be my rival!"

"You are a gentleman, sir—according to your lights, no doubt. You think it an honorable thing to steal into a house and pry into a letter over the writer's shoulder."

The unutterable scorn with which Ada spoke these words cut him to the quick, but he continued, with assumed carelessness:

"All is fair in love and war. I am determined to win you, Miss Ada Wright, and I shall not allow a tramp, and perhaps worse, to stand in my way."

"He is not a tramp. You know better than that."

"I do not know anything of the kind. But that does not matter. I do not consider that he has anything to do with you or me, even though you do write him nice, loving letters without your father's knowledge."

The girl winced, and Plunge, who saw that his shot went home, grinned spitefully. Then he changed his tone, and said:

"Miss Ada, here is the situation: I hold a certain power over your father that he does not suspect. It is necessary that he should win this steeple-chase for which he has entered his black horse, *Flash o' Light.* He has an immense sum of money involved in the result of the race. If he loses, it will mean almost ruin to him."

"Almost?"

"I said almost. He might possibly recover from that loss if another speculation in which he is engaged came out all right. Now, I am the trainer of *Flash o' Light*, and for my own honor I shall try my best to make him win."

"Well?"

"But the other matter—the nature of which I shall not reveal to you now—depends upon your saying nothing to your father about this interview."

"Why not?"

"Because I say so. That must be enough. You are in love with this—this—tramp! Well, I can take care of myself against him. I do not ask you to give him up for me."

The girl smiled contemptuously.

"I say I do not ask you to give him up for me, but I do ask to be allowed to push my suit with you in my own way. I will win you yet, never fear. But I do object to your telling the colonel anything about what I have said to you."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then—"

"What?" thundered another voice, as Colonel Wright strode into the room, and faced the trainer, blazing with passion.

Plunge Thornton was somewhat taken aback by this sudden interruption, but he recovered himself immediately, as he replied, with a sneer:

"I was going to say, I will give up the training of *Flash o' Light.*"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MAN IN THE MASK.

It was the night following the events narrated in the last chapter.

For an hour after Colonel Wright interrupted the interview between his daughter and the trainer the two men had sat talking in the colonel's room, Ada having, at her father's behest, retired for the night.

The nature of the hold that Plunge had over his patron can easily be understood. The rich man was in a mining speculation in which it was necessary to keep certain private information about the mine from the ears of a certain strong syndicate in opposition to the colonel's interests. In some way, best known to himself, Plunge

Thornton had obtained possession of this information. This he had used to force the colonel to give him the coveted position of trainer to Flash o' Light, and now he was holding it over the other's head to bend him to his will in other matters. Plunge was too much a man of the world not to understand that the colonel would be ruined outright rather than suffer his daughter to become the wife of a man like Plunge Thornton, especially against her will, but he felt that he could stave off active opposition by threatening to bring matters to an issue.

So, after a long talk, the two men agreed to a sort of armed truce. Plunge was to do what he could to insure the success of Flash o' Light, and was not to attempt to talk to Ada alone again, and the colonel was to let the insolence of the trainer on this occasion pass over.

The colonel knew nothing about the letter his daughter was writing to her lover, nor had he any idea that she had a lover at all. Plunge did not betray her—not because he had any compunction about doing so, but because he thought it would suit his purpose better to keep it to himself for a time, and spring it on some more propitious occasion. In the mean time, he would keep his eye upon his rival, and perhaps be able to spoil his hopes without showing his hand.

Turning his various schemes over in his mind, the trainer walked jauntily along the tree-shadowed streets of Cleveland on his way to Doctor Fulton's house on the night after his interview with Ada and her father. He had no trouble in finding the house now, nor in getting inside. He knew all the signs, and in less than two minutes from the time that he stood at the doctor's front gate, he was in the back parlor, when the electric light on the table, the skeleton in the closet, and the doctor's own easy-chair, looked as if they had not been touched since the previous night.

"Good-evening, Mr. Leonard, good-evening. Take a seat. Take a seat."

The doctor was as cheery as ever, and though a man of mystery to his neighbors and patients, was a very commonplace and whole-souled man to the trainer.

"Good-evening, doctor."

Plunge Thornton sat in a chair opposite the doctor and waited for what was coming. He was curious to know what the emerald was to reveal to him, and he looked rather eagerly at the parchment that lay at Dr. Fulton's elbow upon his table.

But, somehow, the doctor was not in a hurry to talk about the emerald or the mysterious letters, K. Q. O. that had given him the key to the hidden meaning of the stones. He talked about every ordinary matter that came into his head, and particularly he discoursed upon the great black horse recently brought by Colonel Wright from Philadelphia—Flash o' Light. The doctor seemed to know a great deal about race-horses and their performances, and he talked about them in a way that raised Plunge's opinions of his intelligence, in spite of himself, and notwithstanding his anxiety to hear something about the fortune that he was to secure through the emeralds.

At last, when the doctor had wormed out of him all he knew about Flash o' Light (as he remembered afterward, with many a curse of his own stupidity), he said, as if the thought had suddenly occurred to him:

"Oh, yes, by the way, I was to tell you something about this emerald, was I not? You have given the stone back to the owner, I suppose?"

"No, not yet."

"Not yet?" repeated the doctor, as a frown corrugated his usually smooth white brow, and he began to pull viciously at his long beard.

"Why not yet?"

"Well, because—"

Plunge hesitated. He did not like the expression of his companion's eye. He was not exactly afraid of him, but he did not like it.

"Well, sir—because what?" demanded Fulton.

"Because I wanted to make sure that it would not be necessary for you to see it again when you explained the meaning of those letters to me."

"Let me see the emerald?"

Without hesitation Plunge drew the jewel from its hiding-place in an inner pocket and held it out toward the doctor. The latter put out his hand to take it, when from the shadow behind Plunge another hand came forward, snatched the emerald and disappeared. At the same instant the electric light on the table went out, and the room was in an Egyptian-like darkness.

Plunge Thornton, though by no means a coward, sat in his chair, hardly daring to breathe. The whole proceeding—the snatching of the emerald from him by the mysterious hand, and the extinction of the light—had taken place so suddenly and unexpectedly that he had no time to remonstrate or even utter a sound.

For perhaps a minute the darkness lasted, and then the great electric bulb upon the table burst into life again as mysteriously as it had died out.

Doctor Fulton was still sitting in his chair, with his hand out, just as it had been before the

darkness fell over the room, and he had the same expression of calm wonder that had been there when the strange hand came forward from the shadows.

Plunge looked quickly around the room, and half-rose from his chair. Then, noticing the undisturbed aspect of his companion, he sunk back again to wait for further developments.

"Who was that?" he demanded.

"What do you mean?"

"Who took that stone from my fingers?"

"I do not know."

"You do not know?" repeated Plunge.

"No. I did not see anything but the hand, therefore I do not know for certain who took that jewel, although I suspect some one."

"Who?"

"That I cannot tell you."

"You cannot tell me?"

Plunge Thornton roared this sentence in uncontrollable passion. He began to suspect that he was the victim of some plot in which the doctor was implicated, and the thought made him ignore the mysterious influence that the doctor and his queerly-arranged room had hitherto held over him.

"I cannot tell you," repeated the doctor, quietly.

Like a tiger Plunge Thornton sprang forward, and twisting the doctor's long beard around the fingers of his left hand, he raised his right to plant a terrific blow upon his face.

Had he delivered the blow as he intended, there is reason to fear that Dr. Hezekiah Fulton would have been hardly fit to see his patients for a few days. But the blow never descended. A grip of iron fastened upon his wrist, and he was pulled back as helplessly as if he had been a baby in the hands of a giant.

He still had his fingers twisted in the doctor's beard, so that the medical gentleman was compelled to come forward as his assailant was pulled backward. A rap on Plunge's knuckles, however, was enough to make him release the beard, and then the doctor sat smilingly back in his chair, and watched the struggle as if it were no particular business of his.

Plunge gave his attention to his new assailant, but he soon found that he was no match for him, whoever he might be. A long robe of some dark material, tied around the waist with a cord covered him from head to foot, a hood being pulled so far forward over his face that it would have almost hidden his features even had he not worn a white mask, which gave him a horribly ghastly aspect in the glare of the electric light.

He might have been a monk but for the absence of the rosary and crucifix. As it was he looked like a member of some secret society going through the rites of his order.

Plunge Thornton did not trouble himself much about the stranger's identity. He was too much occupied in trying to get out of his clutches.

Not a word said the cloaked figure. He simply held Plunge back in his chair, and glared at him through the eye-holes of his mask with a pair of eyes that seemed to be of fiendish brilliancy.

"That will do. I guess our friend will not try any more foolish games for a while," said the doctor, good-humoredly, at last.

"Let me go," grunted Plunge, hoarsely, as he made a futile attempt to break from the grasp of the stranger.

The only result of the attempt was that he was held a little tighter and given a warning shake.

"Do not try that, Mr. Leonard. I assure you that it will be of not the slightest use. The gentleman who has come to my assistance so opportunely is a trained athlete, and he can get away with half a dozen men of your physical caliber. He can, 'pon my honor."

The doctor's bantering way of saying this stirred up all the bile in Plunge Thornton's composition, and he felt as if he would be willing to be killed just where he sat, if he could only give the doctor the blow he was about to bestow when this stranger interfered. The feeling was gone in an instant, however, for Plunge always prided himself upon the fact that he never "lost his head," no matter what provocation to do so he might have.

"Will you be quiet if I persuade your friend to take his hands off you, Mr. Leonard?"

"Yes," with a growl.

The tall figure in the cloak and mask released the trainer, but stood beside him ready to hold him again if he made any hostile demonstration.

"Where is my emerald?" demanded Plunge, as he lay back in his chair, with his eyes rolling from the doctor to the masked figure and back again.

"I assure you that I have not got it, Mr. Leonard," said the doctor, airily.

"I lost it in your house. It was stolen from me in this room, and I shall hold you responsible."

"Indeed! You can prove that the jewel is yours, of course?"

"That is none of your business!" returned Plunge, with a scowl.

"I don't know that!"

"I do."

"I want my emerald."

"I am afraid you will not get it."

"Oh, yes, I will."

"Think so?"

"I know so," sullenly.

The doctor smiled, and the masked figure, putting its hand into the folds of the long dark cloak, withdrew it with the emerald brooch in the fingers.

Plunge jumped up and tried to snatch it away, but the stranger was too quick for him. He held the jewel out of Plunge's reach, and with the left hand forced him back into the chair, while the doctor sat opposite and smiled.

"You see, Mr. Leonard, I have learned since yesterday to whom this brooch belongs, and, since you have not returned it, I shall take the liberty of doing so myself—by my representative," pointing to the stranger, who bowed his hooded and masked head.

"You will!" howled Plunge, in a transport of rage; "and how do you know who it belongs to? You—you—"

He was going to apply some opprobrious epithet to the doctor, but his habit of restraining himself came to his aid, and he shut his mouth with a snap, and repressed his anger with a mighty effort, as he saw that the doctor was about to speak again.

"I shall return the emerald to its owner," repeated Dr. Fulton.

"And its secret?"

"Belongs to the owner of the stone," answered the doctor, quietly.

"Very well. I suppose it must be as you say."

Plunge forced a resigned expression into his face, and the mysterious stranger looked toward the doctor, as if for further instructions.

This gave the trainer the opportunity he had been awaiting, and which he felt sure would come at last.

Suddenly springing from his chair, he darted past the stranger toward the door. The stranger turned to follow him, but Plunge, shooting out his right foot, caused him to stumble slightly, and put out his hand to save himself from falling. The hand was thus thrust immediately in front of the trainer.

Plunge saw the emerald shining in his hand. In an instant he had dragged the hand to his mouth, closed his teeth sharply upon the knuckles, and compelled the fingers to unclose.

The emerald dropped into Plunge Thornton's hand, and, with a yell of triumph, he dashed out of the doorway of the parlor, through the dark hall to the front door.

It was fastened!

CHAPTER XIX.

PLUNGE IN DURANCE.

THE scene shifts back to Colonel Wright's stables at Euclid avenue. The stall in which Flash o' Light formerly resided, is occupied by another horse—the one that his owner liked to use for his own driving.

The horse is not alone, however. There are two human beings to bear him company—Snide Bill and Dora, the manager of the boarding-house on the Flats, known as Dora's Place.

"What wuz yer idee in takin' ther hoss at all, Dora?" Snide Bill was asking, with a very discontented expression on his countenance.

"Because I knew that you couldn't do anything with it up at that Brooklyn crib, and there was no use in making the captain mad for nothing, was there?"

"But he is mad anyhow. The hoss got to him all right, anyhow, but it wuz took by that durned skunk, Morton, an' he is onto our game, so thet thar is no safety in nothin' now. Ther fu'st thing we know, he will go snoopin' aroun' thet thar stable an' bring ther Flash to ther front in spite uv our teeth. Thet's 'bout what he'll do."

Snide Bill's neck twisted abruptly as he said this, as was its way when he was very much annoyed or excited. The old woman noticed this, for she said, with a croaking laugh:

"Snide, you are the ugliest man I ever saw, I think. Why don't you have that neck of yours made straight. You can never be a masher as long as it sticks on one side as it does now."

Bill scowled. He was in no mood for pleasantries of any kind, least of all of a personal nature.

"Wal, thar's no need ter be talkin' 'bout me. I want ter know how we air goin' ter fix this hyar thing. My 'pinion is ther best way will be to take ther captain out o' this hyar job altogether."

"Ah!"

"Yes, and ah ag'in, ez many times ez yer like. He's been an' got himself into all kinds uv scrapes. He's got thet stone ez b'longs ter me an' Kid an' Wilk, an' he's afraid ter give it ter us, an' he's afraid ter keep it himself."

"Why?"

"Why?" repeated Snide Bill, in a disgusted tone. "Didn't yer hear nothin' about his caper last night? He sez he went ter some house in Cleveland here on business, an' a feller stole the em'rald from him. Wal, he got it back, an' made a jump for the front door, but the door wuz fastened up with some electrical fake. Wal, ther other feller wuz jest behind him ter take ther stone away from him, when ther door

opened somehow, on account of the owner of the house accidentally hitting the electrical button, ther Cap thinks, an' he managed ter git away."

"Wal, why don't he take some of the boys and clean out the house?" suggested Dora, placidly.

"Yes, that would be a wise thing, no doubt, considerin' ther way we all stand with ther perlice," grinned Snide.

"Has he got the emerald now?"

"Yes, he confesses he hez it, but he is afraid ter do anything with it."

"But you gave it to him. Why doesn't he turn it over to you, as it belongs to?"

"I don't know that I want it jist now. Thar seems ter be some ill-luck 'bout ther cursed thing. What I want ter see is Flash o' Light fixed. It's gittin' near ther time uv thet durned steeple-chase. I s'pose you hev heerd that they hev changed ther date uv it two months earlier, eh?"

"Yes."

"Wal, that makes it on'y three weeks from ter-day. It's rather tough when a hoss isn't in condition, an' thet's what's ther matter with ther Flash, don't yer see," said Snide Bill slyly, as his head twisted a little toward the left.

"Well?"

"Wal, I'm inclined ter think ef we could take ther hoss out uv Plunge Thornton's hands we could make more money out uv it than he will. He is so cussed scared I'm 'fraid he won't be able ter do anything."

"Hush!" whispered the old man, holding up a finger warningly.

"What's the matter?" whispered Snide, looking around him apprehensively.

"Hist! He's coming."

"Who's coming? What d'ye mean? Why don't yer speak plain? With yer hushing an' yer histing!" whispered Snide Bill, savagely, for he was afraid of something he did not know what, and he took revenge on his fear by bullying his companion, as such a man naturally would.

The answer to Snide Bill's suitable query came in the shape of Plunge Thornton, who stepped through the doorway into the stable with the air of one who was the master.

"Snide, I want to see you."

"Me?"

Snide said this only for the sake of gaining time. He knew what Plunge meant, and he did not know exactly what to do about it for the moment.

"I want you to come down to Dora's Place with me right now. And Dora, you go yourself, and be ready to receive us. What are you doing here, anyhow?"

"I am here to see my friend, Snide. We have business of our own sometimes that has nothing to do with you."

Plunge took no particular notice of the sharpness of Dora's tongue. He just waved her off as if she did not count for much, and the old woman departed, mumbling to herself, to take a street-car and get to her boarding-house by Walworth Row as soon as might be.

"Snide," said Plunge, as soon as Dora was out of the side gate, which the head groom now took the precaution to secure on the inside.

"Well."

"You have been playing a double game on me."

"Me, Plunge?"

"Yes, you. Don't try to deny it, because I know all about it. You tried to get the horse, Flash o' Light, away from me, and it was only by chance that your precious little scheme failed. Now, Snide, I will not trust you again. I just came to warn you not to try anything of that kind again, because it will not work, and you will only find yourself in trouble if you attempt it."

"What 'bout that em'rald?" growled Snide.

"I will return it to its owner—when I am through with it. And now come with me. I left my buggy outside and I will drive you down."

Snide Bill hated Plunge Thornton from the bottom of his heart, but somehow the trainer exercised an influence over him that he could not withstand. So he climbed into the buggy that was waiting outside the side door, and the long-legged chestnut horse was soon dashing away in the direction of the Flats beneath the constant urging of his driver, who was not disposed to spare the whip to-day.

It was evening, just about dusk, when Plunge Thornton interfered in the conference of Snide Bill and Dora at Euclid avenue, and when the buggy stopped at the Place in the Flats it was quite dark.

Driving under the shed, and letting the long-legged chestnut stand hitched to a post, Plunge went into the dark hallway of the house, with Snide at his heels and reached the kitchen.

The room was empty save for Dora, she having turned such of her boarders as were at home into the bar-room.

As soon as the door was shut Plunge looked around him, and then, without warning seized Snide by his crooked neck and shook him with the greatest heartiness.

Snide's head twisted more and more under this vigorous treatment, while the expression of

his countenance denoted extreme surprise. At last he found enough breath to exclaim in a disjointed way:

"What—in—thunder—air—yer—doing?"

"You scoundrell! I have a good mind to do for you altogether!" hissed Plunge.

Since this attack upon Snide Bill may appear as strange and uncalled-for as it did to the victim, it may be explained that the idea had become firmly rooted into the mind of the trainer that he was indebted to Snide for the attempt to take from him the emerald in Dr. Fulton's office the night before. He could not think of any one else who knew anything about his being in possession of it, and he believed that the misshapen head groom had employed some one to arrange with the doctor to get the jewel and frighten him (Plunge) at the same time. How the scheme—if it was as the trainer suspected—had succeeded, we already know.

Dora had been watching the struggle of Snide Bill with Plunge Thornton for a moment without any interference, and it seemed as if the trainer really would make his threat good, for he showed no disposition to release the unhappy Snide, when the door from the bar-room opened and a face that is familiar to us, no other than that of Kid the Skipper, appeared, and unseen by Plunge, made a sign to Dora.

She nodded, as Snide Bill, in spite of his being shaken so violently that he could not see any thing very clearly, managed to comprehend that something was going on.

Kid the Skipper, closely followed by the discontented Wilk, stole softly into the room until they were immediately behind Plunge, who was fully occupied with Snide.

There was a scuffle, a few incoherent words, and then Plunge Thornton, with a sack over his head, was thrown to the floor, and his arms and legs tied tightly with stout cords.

Snide Bill, stepping back, shook himself as if to make sure that he had not been injured in his late racket with the trainer, and then bestowed two or three kicks upon his now helpless enemy with an expression of extreme gravity.

"What shall we do with him now we have him, Snide? Take him ter the Brooklyn crib?"

Snide Bill stood looking thoughtfully at his companions for a moment.

"I dunno," he said, slowly. "This hyar bizness must be managed keerfully or we'll git inter trouble ourselves. All we want ter do is ter keep him quiet till after this hyar race. I think ther best thing we kin do is ter carry him ter his own place, and keep him in his own room. D'ye see? Ef he's thar we kin let people know he's thar, but kin sw'ar he's sick. We hev ther em'rald bizness ter hold over him ef he ever tries ter kick, an' when we've worked ther hoss, Flash o' Light, all right, we kin let him out, an' he dasn't say nothin'."

Snide Bill had spoken softly, so that the trainer under the sack could not hear a word, and his three listeners nodded their heads in approval.

It was quite dark outside, so that they had no fear of being noticed by inquisitive people on the streets while they were conveying the trainer to his stables outside the city.

They carried him out, stiff, like a mummy, and laid him in a heap on the floor of the buggy. Then Snide and Kid took their places on the seat, with Wilk the Tough riding behind. Snide Bill took the reins, and soon the chestnut horse, having cleared the viaduct, was dashing along Pearl street toward Brooklyn village, and thence to the open country wherein were situated the stables of Leonard Thornton.

The three men knew the ways of the place well enough to get in without disturbing the whole place. They rung a small bell, that brought to the gate Mose Lloyd, half-asleep.

"All right, Mose. We air goin' ter stay all night. You git ter bed. We'll put up ther boss," said Snide.

Mose, who wanted nothing better than to be allowed to retire, but who had been sitting up by Plunge Thornton's orders, to let him in when he should come home, saw in the gloom that it was the chestnut horse, and supposed that Plunge was among the three or four men with the buggy. So he drowsily slouched away to his quarters in Flash o' Light's stable, and thought no more about the matter.

At the back of the stables was a two-story brick building, which Plunge Thornton reserved for his own use when he stayed at the stables. It was secured by a strong outer door, and the four windows of the two rooms, which overlooked the track were each fitted with thick iron shutters, through which no ordinary sound could penetrate to the outer world.

Into this building was Mr. Thornton taken, the keys to the front door and to the upper from in which he was accustomed to sleep being found in his pocket.

Being placed in the upper room, the sack was taken from his head, and he gasped for breath in a way that made his three captors rather glad that they had released him before he suffocated.

CHAPTER XX.

THE EMERALD CHANGES HANDS AGAIN.

PLUNGE was evidently half-unconscious, but

was coming to himself now that the heavy sack had been removed from his nose and mouth.

"Quick, boys. Go through him," whispered Snide.

"Like a bloomin' bird," responded Wilk the Tough, with alacrity.

The scientific manner in which Kid and Wilk brought forth all Plunge Thornton's personal property and laid it on the table by the side of the bed on which he lay, indicated that they were accustomed to such operations.

Snide Bill glanced over the things they brought forth—a well-filled pocketbook, watch and chain, knife, pistol, etc.—with undisguised impatience.

"That all yer kin find?" he asked, with a scowl.

"Guess so."

"Let me try."

"Go ahead."

Not troubling himself with the ordinary pockets in the trainer's clothing, Snide Bill pulled open the front of the shirt and, as he expected, found a small pocket or pouch inside. The next minute he held up in his fingers—the emerald!

Kid and Wilk grabbed at it simultaneously, but Snide Bill, with a crafty smile, drew it back and put it in his own pocket.

"Not yet, boys. We will divide it some other time. Trust me, it sha'n't get into his hands again."

"That's all right, Snide, but I'd like to hold that bloomin' stone myself for awhile. It's as much mine as it is yours or Kid's, but I've never 'ad a sight on it yet hardly," grumbled the Tough, who always thought somebody was imposing upon him.

"Wal, hold it an' see how it feels," grinned Snide, handing the jewel to him. "Hyar it is."

Wilk took the emerald, turned it over and over in his hands, licked it, admired it by the light of the lamp that he had lighted on entering the room, by the way, and which stood in the center of the table, and at last handed it back, reluctantly, to Snide Bill.

"Satisfied, Wilk?"

"A'most. I'll be more satisfied when I gits my share on it," answered the Tough.

"You shall hev it ter-night, most likely, returned Snide, as he again hid the jewel in his pocket.

Plunge Morton's eyes had remained closed so far, but now, as he revived they opened, and he looked at his three captors with an expression that made them tremble, in spite of themselves.

Snide backed away and suddenly extinguished the light. Then he went to the door, and was closely followed by his two companions.

As all three stood outside in the yard at the back of the stables, and having secured the front door of the brick house in which its owner lay, a helpless captive, looked up at the heavily-shuttered windows. Snide tried to think what was the best thing to do next. His purpose was to get Flash o' Light away from Plunge, for he had made up his mind that the trainer was not to be trusted, and would be just as likely to let the horse win as not. He need not have had any such fear, for Thornton had bet so heavily against the colonel's racer, that it would have been suicide to let him win, to say nothing of other reasons he had for keeping Colonel Wright in his power, about which the reader has already some knowledge.

The buggy was still standing in the inclosure near the gate, and Snide was thinking of borrowing it to get back to Dora's Place, for he felt sure that Plunge could remain quietly where he was for the next twelve hours, at all events, when he was startled by the sudden appearance of a little man, with a big beard, attired in a long, old-fashioned coat, reaching to his heels, and completely enveloping his bent form. An old man was he, and his first accents betrayed his race.

"Ach! mein tear! V'at you vant mit me? Mr. Isenstein told me zat you haf von pig jewel—von sbplendid stone, v'at I vas to see, don't id?"

"Isenstein, eh? Who told him I wuz goin' ter be hyar ter-night?"

"Dora," answered the old man, in a husky whisper.

"By Caesar, thet thar's er smart woman," muttered Snide Bill to himself. Then he added, aloud: "Wal, ef you've come from Isenstein, you know what ter say an' do."

"Ach, mein tear, yah! See!"

The old man suddenly grasped Snide's fingers and pinched them in a peculiar way. Then he whispered a word in his ear.

"Thet's all right. You're hyar fer bizness, air yer?"

"Yah."

"D'ye know what it's worth?"

"Not till I see it."

"All right. Well, come hyar. Did you ride ter ther stables? Whar's yer vehicle?"

Snide Bill's habits of life had rendered him suspicious, and he always liked to know everything possible about people he did business with before he revealed anything to them or trusted them in any way.

"Nein. I did not ride. I mean I did not ride up to der gade. I lefd mein buggy half a mile

away. I vill go to id when I git through mit you."

"Hev yer got the money with yer?"

"Nein, but I gif you der order on Isenstein."

"Um! I'd ruther hev ther money down."

"Yes, but id would not be safe. I'm only an old mans, und I might be robbed," answered the Jew, with a deprecatory turning out of his hands.

"Of course. You fellers are allers 'fraid of being robbed. But I guess you and old Isenstein kin both take care uv yerselves, when it comes to ther pinch.

There was an amused gleam in the bright eyes that shone under the heavy eyebrows of the old Hebrew; but it was only momentary, and Snide Bill did not even see it, to say nothing of his attaching any significance to it.

"Vell, the emerald," said the old man, rather impatiently. "I moost not vaste mein time. Der emerald."

"Great hurry all at once, ain't yer? Never mind. Come in hyar."

As Snide Bill spoke he ambled away as fast as his bow legs could carry him in the direction of Flash o' Light's stable. The door was locked, but Bill knocked loudly and authoritatively at the door, with the result that Mose Lloyd opened it and stood blinking at him in the light of the lantern that hung against the wall inside.

"It's all right, me bloomin' duffer," said Wilk cheerily. "We want to 'ave a leetle talk in 'ere fer a minute or two."

Before Lloyd could raise any objection, and, indeed, before he had fairly got his wits together, he was pushed back, and the four men entered, Bill fastening the door inside, as Isenstein's representative, who was the last to enter in his modesty, stepped over toward the boy and put his arm around his neck lovingly.

"You vas a nice poy. I likes a poy like you," he croaked, giving him a hug.

Mose started, as if he did not quite understand the behavior of the Jew, and Kid the Skipper chuckled.

"Yah! You vas a nice poy. You hear v'at I say, eh?" added Isenstein's man, as he pulled Mose's head down upon his shoulder. Then turning to Snide Bill, he added: "You see, Bill, I vas a mesmerist. I make him do v'at I say. Mose, you go oop in der gorner, an' you not move till I tell you. So."

He pointed to a distant corner of the stable, where the steeple-chaser was standing, contentedly eating his oats. The place was large, and Flash o' Light was loose to roam about it wherever he pleased, but he seemed to prefer the corner to which the old man pointed, and he was usually to be found there when left to his own devices.

"All right, boss. I'se gwine," answered Mose, as with his eyes bulging and showing a great deal of white, he went behind the horse and threw himself upon a heap of loose hay.

"See, poy. I haf him onder der influence. He not move now till I tell him."

The old fellow laughed as he said this. At least it is to be presumed he did, for his head shook and his big beard wagged in a way suggestive of much internal merriment.

"Comical old duck," commented Kid, in a low voice.

"Now, poy, der shtone."

Snide Bill took the emerald from its place of concealment in his clothes and held it up in the light of the lantern.

Hardly had he done so when the fingers of the Jew closed upon it and snatched it from his hand.

"Ach. Yah! Eet ees very fine shtone—very fine. Yah! Yah! V're you geet dees, eh?"

"None o' yer business. It came in ther regular way uv trade. Ther question is, what air yer goin' ter do about it?"

"I geef you two t'ousan' tollar."

"Two thousand dollars? Yer must be rich. I know ther value uv thet thar sparkler, an' it's worth ten thousand dollars," exclaimed Snide Bill, angrily, as he scowled over his left shoulder at the old man.

"Ach! Yah! Pr'aps so. But, you see, mein tear, id coom in der vay uv trade, and you cannot gid der full value, or v're would der trade of mein frient Isenstein be, and v'at would begome of me?"

"Oh, durn you. Who cares about you?"

"I gare, mein frient, und I say I pay you tree t'ousand tollar, und dat's all," returned the Jew, firmly, as he turned toward the door, still with the emerald tightly clasped in his hand.

"Give me thet stone back. I won't let Isenstein hev it at no price unless he comes ter mo himself," replied Snide Bill, angrily.

"V'at you say? You not let mein frient Isenstein haf it? Vell, den, I go home."

With a rapid movement he had unfastened the door, and was outside before either of the three men divined his purpose.

Running across the space between the door of the stable and the horse and buggy that stood where Snide Bill had left it, he sprang into the vehicle, and giving the chestnut horse a cut with the whip, was flying along the dark road outside at a speed that made pursuit useless.

Bang, bang, went two pistol-shots from revolvers in the hands of Wilk and Kid, while

Snide Bill danced up and down in impotent rage, waving the buckhorn-handled knife, and threatening to kill everybody and everything in his wrath and discomfiture.

"Wal, Snide, thet was pretty slick, eh?" observed Kid the Skipper at last, when it was apparent that Isenstein's agent—a pretended agent, as they feared he would turn out to be—had got beyond their reach.

Snide Bill was about to reply, when a fist, propelled by a powerful arm stretched him upon the ground half-insensible, while two strong hands seized Kid and Wilk by the backs of their necks and banged their heads together so heartily that they each saw many thousands of stars in a very few minutes.

"Get up," commanded a gruff voice that Snide Bill, trembling like a leaf, recognized at once. "Get up!"

Snide slowly arose to his feet, and although he could not distinguish the features of the newcomer, he knew that a pair of dark eyes were scowling upon him with an intensity suggestive of their owner looking right through him.

"So, you miserable, double-dealing, bow-legged sneak! You thought you could steal a march upon me. Why, I—"

The feelings of the speaker overcame him, and he ended the sentence by giving the wretched Snide a cuff with his open hand that sent him spinning against Wilk, who, in turn, came into collision with Kid, who shoved him back to the speaker.

"Wal, but—" began Snide, apologetically.

"Silence! Who was that just drove away, and who were you shooting at?" demanded the other.

"Why, yer see—"

"I do not see anything. Explain yourself, or I'll kill you where you stand, you burlesque on a man!"

The willingness of the speaker to do what he threatened was so evident that Snide Bill answered as fast as he could speak:

"It wuz er man frum Isenstein, the—the—fence, you know—"

"What do you mean by saying that I know? I do not know anything about Isenstein—a fence. Tell me your story, and tell me quickly," interrupted his interrogator, with a threatening step forward.

"Wal, he's got that thar em'rald uv mine, thet's all," returned Snide Bill, with the air of a man who was determined to tell the worst and be done with it.

"What?"

There was a hasty fumbling inside his shirt on the part of the other, and then with a howl he threw himself upon Snide Bill, and again knocked him down.

"Hold on, Cap! Hold on, Plunge! Don't kill the man," interposed Kid, the Skipper.

"Kill him! I'll kill all three of you!" replied Plunge Thornton, as he vainly felt about his person for a weapon, which, as we know, the three worthies had carefully removed a short time before, when they left him in his room, a helpless prisoner, as they supposed. Had they not taken this precaution it is more than probable they would have ended their existence now at the hands of the infuriated trainer.

CHAPTER XXI.

A TRIAL GALLOP.

It was the next morning, and the sunshine, covering the country with a flood of golden glory, burst upon the training stables and track of Leonard Thornton & Co., revealing as peaceful a scene as could be desired.

There were no signs of the lawless proceedings of the night before, except that Plunge Thornton's buggy, dusty, muddy, and otherwise showing that it had been used without much care, stood near the entrance of Flash o' Light's stable.

The chestnut horse, too, was tired and stiff, but he was comfortable, in his stall, having been rubbed down and well supplied with food and water. What he had passed through and where he had been in the dark hours preceding, he might have told, had he possessed human intelligence. As it was he held his peace, and no one save those that had used him was the wiser.

Kid and Wilk went about their work under the direction of Plunge Thornton, devoting most of their time to Flash o' Light. Not a word had the trainer said to either of them about the outrage upon him the night before. When he had vented his rage upon Kid the Skipper, by knocking him down, and after a futile search in his clothing for weapons, he had gone quietly back to his own house in which he had so lately been a prisoner, and fastening himself in had stayed there till six o'clock in the morning. Then he had emerged, as calmly as ever, and had personally supervised the morning toilet of Flash o' Light, while giving cursory attention to matters concerning the other races in his care.

He had not spoken a word about the doings of the night, and although he had frequent occasion to speak to Kid and Wilk in the way of business, he contented himself with giving his orders in the matter-of-fact, only manner pe-

culiar to him, without showing any particular resentment toward them.

Snide Bill had disappeared as soon as the departure of Plunge Thornton made it seem safe for him to do so. He had not exchanged a word with Kid or Wilk, and they did not press him to say anything. They felt that, under the circumstances, silence was the best thing for all parties.

As for Mose, he was more silent than any one else, but there was a wild look in his eye, that showed he was thinking earnestly, albeit confusedly, about certain events. He was, in fact, the most puzzled individual about Plunge Thornton's training stables on that bright, summer morning.

"Mose."

"Sah."

"Bring Flash out here."

"Yes, sah."

Mose Lloyd stepped up to the head of the steeple-chaser, who, enswathed in blankets from nose to tail, had just been taken in, after being carefully rubbed down, and having his feet washed with warm water by the trainer himself.

"Come, Flash."

The horse knew the boy's voice, and it was unnecessary for Mose to touch him to lead him out.

Plunge looked critically at his feet, and putting his hand under the blanket, felt the temperature of his body. Then he listened at his heart and gazed straight into his eyes, which were as bright and clear as a gazelle's.

The inspection seemed to satisfy the trainer, for, although he had intended to prevent the horse winning the steeple-chase in which he could meet Captain Wood's Loafer, his pride in his profession would not allow him to spoil the horse in his training—as yet.

What Plunge Thornton thought about the rough treatment he had been subjected to, and whom he suspected of having the emerald now, he did not reveal. His sole attention seemed to be given to Flash o' Light, to the exclusion of every other thought.

"Wilk!"

"Vell?"

Wilk, the Tough, was not in a very good humor, and, moreover, he did not know what would be the outcome of his previous night's adventures. He knew better than to suppose that the trainer would let it pass over without some action on his part, however quiet he might be over it now.

"Come here, Wilk."

Thornton's tones were not particularly conciliatory, but neither were they any more surly than usual. Wilk had that comfort, although it was rather a slight one.

"Help Mose saddle that horse! Where's Kid?"

"Oh, 'e's down behind the shanty."

"Call him!"

Kid, the Skipper came up in response to a call, looking as unconcerned as possible, but revealing, by the cautious glance from the corner of his eye, that he was afraid of some outbreak from Thornton at any instant.

In the mean time, Mose and Wilk, under the close supervision of the trainer, were taking off the cloths from Flash o' Light, following the action by rubbing him briskly from nose to tail with a coarse cloth.

Then they stood back and allowed Thornton to take a good view of him in the sunlight, with no blankets or hood to hide any of his beauties.

And a beauty he was as he stood there, with his head proudly upraised, looking around at the men, and apparently glorying in the strength and speed hidden in his clean limbs and perfect body.

Black as night, his sleek coat shone like satin.

Not a white hair relieved his jet darkness. His small head, well-proportioned body, full chest, and neat limbs, betokened the racer in every inch of him, while the bright intelligence in his large, liquid eyes evidenced that he could be depended upon for the last ounce of strength that he could raise in the finish of a contest.

Such was Flash o' Light, and such the trainer, Plunge Thornton, recognized him to be, as he gazed at him on that bright summer morning.

"Put the saddle on him."

Mose brought from the stable a gayly-patterned saddle-cloth first, which was carefully strapped over his back to prevent the saddle chafing him. Then the saddle, a light specimen of its kind, softly padded inside, so that even without the cloth, it could hardly have hurt the horse's back, was brought out and placed on the Flash as exactly in its proper position, as if it had been a matter of life or death that it should not swerve half an inch either way.

Plunge himself helped to adjust the saddle, buckling the straps with both hands, and paying particular attention to the length of the stirrups, and other details of the harness.

"Not that bridle!" he exclaimed angrily, as Mose came out of the stable with a headpiece, to which a twisted bit was attached. "Not that

bridle. Do you think I want to break his mouth in two on a trial gallop, you black fool? Get the other one, with the black rosettes, from behind the door."

"If I am brack I ain't no wuss for dat, I s'pecks," grumbled Mose, as he went into the stable with the bridle. "He too mighty 'sultin' ter please me, dat Mista Thornton. He an' me hab trubble yet afore we lives much longer."

"What's that?" demanded Plunge, whose hearing seemed to be almost supernaturally sharp this morning.

Mose did not answer. He exchanged the bridles and speedily brought out the one with the black rosettes, which met with the favor of the trainer, and caused him to relax his severe expression somewhat.

He put the bridle on, gently insinuating the bit—a much lighter one than that brought out at first—into the mouth of the horse, and talking soothingly into his ears all the time.

"Now, you see, Mose, it wouldn't have done at all to drive him on that heavy twisted bit," he said, condescendingly, as he stroked Flash's neck. "We may have to put it on when the race comes off, but for these early trial gallops we must coax him, don't you see?"

Mose nodded. The conciliatory tones of the other's voice had somewhat of a mollifying effect upon him, but he could not feel quite reconciled to the general behavior of Mr. Thornton all at once.

Thornton, having adjusted everything to his satisfaction, with Wilk and Kid the Skipper looking admiringly on, turned suddenly toward the last named and commanded him to take off his coat.

Kid, who knew what the order meant, obeyed at once, and stepping into the stable brought out a light riding-whip, which he hung from his wrist by a leather loop at the handle.

Plunge looked him up and down, and his glance reaching his feet, he demanded angrily why he had no spurs on.

"Want spurs, captain?" asked Kid, rather wonderingly.

"Want spurs? Of course I do. Why not? You will wear spurs in the race, won't you?"

"If I'm Flash's jockey, I suppose I shall, but I did not know that I was ter hev ther mount," replied the Skipper, with a peculiar grin, that evaporated almost before it appeared.

For a second there seemed to be something like an answering smile on the stern face of Plunge Thornton, but if it was there at all it was so slight that no one could swear to it.

"You don't know who will be Flash's jockey any more than I do," he returned, in his usual hard tones, "but that does not make any difference, I want you to wear your spurs, so go and get them, right away."

"Certainly, captain," answered Kid, skipping to the other end of the row of stables and disappearing into the shanty.

He came out a moment later with his spurs in his hand, hanging by their straps, and appearing very cruel in their general make-up. But, as Kid and Thornton both knew well, it depended more on the way they were used than anything else how much pain they would inflict.

At last the Skipper was accoutered to Plunge's satisfaction, with his spurs strapped to his heels, his hat firmly pressed over his brows, and his whip dangling from his wrist.

A "leg up," and Kid was astride Flash o' Light.

"Now, Kid, try him on a mile at an easy gallop. Then put him on another for all that is in him. See?"

"Yes."

"All right. How's the track?" he shouted to several of his men who were carefully looking over every inch of the half-mile space to see that there was nothing on the short turf, such as stones or pieces of hard mud, that might hurt the feet of the precious animal that was about to speed over it.

"How's the track?" he repeated, at the top of his voice.

"All right," came back an answering shout from one man, which was quickly taken up by the others.

"Very well, then. Let her go, Kid."

Kid the Skipper did not make any particular ceremony of starting for the trial gallop. Pressing his knees against his horse's side, he cantered him gently to the starting-post, and then, tightening the rein with an admonitory jerk, let Flash gallop around the track.

Plunge, Mose and Wilk all stood where they happened to be near the door of the stable, watching the movements of the horse, noting the length of his stride, how he took it, his carriage of his head and his tail, and the stamina that he appeared to possess.

The other stablemen, who had been walking over the track to pick up obstructions, stopped just where they were, and took as careful note of the performance of the racer as the trainer himself.

Kid handled the horse well. He was a trained jockey, as was evident as soon as he was in the saddle. He rode as lightly as possible, rising with his horse, and helping him in every stride by relieving him of the dead weight at the critical moment. Kid thoroughly understood a

fact known to every horseman—that the rider can make the work very much easier for his steed if he only knows how to do it.

Kid had gone around the track once, and upon reaching the spot where stood Thornton, had received with a nod of intelligence that worthy's command to "let him out a little on the last lap and give him his head when he crosses the line for the mile."

The trainer desired to see all that could be done by Flash o' Light in a mile, and had decided to let him do the easy preliminary mile to warm him up to his work. It must be remembered that the event in which the races was to take part was a steeple-chase, in which wind and bottom would tell even more than speed.

Kid was well around the track the second time, and was increasing his speed in obedience to Plunge Thornton's mandate, preparatory to crossing the line for the fast mile at the best pace, when Plunge suddenly started up from his easy, negligent position and yelled wildly to Kid to stop, emphasizing his command by standing in the middle of the track and waving his arms like a maniac.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FATE OF BLACK DEVIL.

It was with some difficulty that the Skipper drew up the Flash. He was coming down the homestretch at such a rate that had he not been in perfect control of his horse, and known exactly what to do and how to do it, he would have gone several hundred yards over the new mile before he could have obeyed the trainer's frenzied signals.

He drew Flash o' Light back almost upon his haunches, as it was. Then, as he turned him, and cantered gently back to the trainer, he asked, breathlessly:

"What's ther matter, Cap?"

"Mose! Wilk! Take him into the stable and rub him down," said the trainer, shortly, to the men he named, without answering Kid's question.

Kid sprang from Flash o' Light's back and waited for Plunge to give him some explanation.

"Come here," said Plunge.

He walked quickly up the track past the elevated shed that was used for the judge's box, and into which he would have ascended had he not seen occasion to stop the trial of the fast mile. Reaching a certain part of the high board fence, he suddenly stooped and applied his eye to a knot-hole.

The first thing he saw was Snide Bill standing outside, with a long strap of steel wire in his hand.

"Look, Kid."

The Skipper glanced through the hole and saw. Then he arose and was about to utter some violent exclamation, when Plunge clapped his hand over his mouth.

"Don't say a word," he commanded gruffly. "I do not mean to let you give him warning that he is caught. I will attend to him."

Kid protested, in a low voice, that nothing was further from his thoughts than giving Snide Bill warning, but Plunge stopped him without ceremony.

"That's all right. You need not blather about it. I do not trust you, anyhow. You should know that by this time," he muttered coolly. "But I mean to fool this fellow, and then I'll take care that he is—"

He stopped suddenly, for he saw that Kid the Skipper was listening open-mouthed and eagerly to hear what his intentions were. Plunge Thornton was not the man to reveal his plans to any one, least of all to a man whom he had every reason to suppose would try to frustrate them.

"Bring out Black Devil," he commanded, as with Kid by his side, he walked back to the stables.

One of the stablemen to whom he had addressed himself at once disappeared through the doorway adjoining the stable of Flash o' Light and a moment later came forth leading a large black horse, enough like the Flash to deceive any one at a distance, or even close to him, if the observer was not very well acquainted with the appearance of Colonel Wright's beauty.

From the position of the hole in the fence through which Snide Bill was doubtless taking observations the trainer knew he could not see any of the proceedings near the stables, and though he was doubtless aware that there had been some occurrence stopping the trial of the Flash for a fast mile, he could not tell what it was.

Plunge looked all over the horse Black Devil, but keeping well away from his heels. The animal had a playful habit of lashing out occasionally, and would be just as likely to kick out the brains of the trainer as of any one else.

Black Devil deserved his name. He had as bad a temper as any horse was ever cursed with, and already he had killed one stable-boy and injured four others, though under four years of age.

His eyes lacked the limpid clearness of Flash's, and there were streaks of red in the eye-

balls like those of a bad-tempered man in the habit of drinking more than was good for him.

Black Devil's coat, however, was as glossy and fine as that of the other horse, and his general proportions were just about the same. As remarked already, one could hardly tell one from the other, especially at a slight distance.

What was the purpose of Plunge Thornton? It was soon revealed.

"Put the saddle on him," he commanded, briefly.

The same saddle-cloth, saddle and bridle that had lately been worn by Flash o' Light—who was now standing in her stall, uncovered, undergoing a brisk rubbing down at the hands of Mose Lloyd—were now put on Black Devil, after considerable remonstrance, in the shape of kicks and bites, by that gentle animal.

Then the trainer walked around him, in a wide circle, noting all his points and chuckling inwardly to himself over the way he hoped to catch Snide Bill. For his own reasons, he wanted to exhibit the treachery of that individual to his stable helpers, including Kid and Wilk. Otherwise, he could easily have been revenged upon him at once for his outrage of the night before, Plunge was playing a deep game, however, and he had reasons for all his acts.

"All right," he growled, at last.

In obedience to a signal, Kid leaped upon Black Devil's back.

No sooner had he done so than he found it would take all his skill to keep there. The horse kicked, reared, plunged, threatened to roll over, did all that a horse could do to displace his rider, but in vain. Kid stuck to him like a barnacle to a ship's hull. His whip was dangling from his wrist, and though he would have liked to visit it with stinging effect upon the Devil, he dared not do so without express orders from Plunge.

Wilk stood back and laughed. He and Kid had never buried the hatchet and were not likely to do so until they had met in a 24-foot ring and settled forever which was entitled to supremacy in the ranks of light-weight pugilistic champions.

"The bloomin' 'oss 'll throw 'im off yet, by crimony," he chuckled. "Sarve 'im right, too; 'e thinks 'e's so bloomin' clever."

"Shut up," commanded Plunge, sternly.

"Yes, he'd better, or I'll git down off'n this hyar boss an' give him what be's askin' fer," panted Kid, who, notwithstanding the occupation given him by Black Devil, had managed to hear and comprehend the remark of Wilk.

Wilk would have liked to reply, and would doubtless have done so, had not the trainer cried out, in stentorian tones:

"Kid, run Flash o' Light around the track once more, gently, and then put him along for that mile. He is all right now."

This was meant for the ears of Snide Bill, who, he was sure, was waiting outside the inclosure, ready to carry out his intention of laming Flash o' Light.

"Now, see here, Kid," added the trainer, in low tones, as, stepping up to Black Devil's head, he seized the bridle in his iron grasp, and held the frisky animal as quiet as might be, while he talked. "Go at an easy canter around the half-mile, and then, when you get to the string, push him."

"Yes."

"But look out for that place opposite the hole."

"Wal."

"Snide Bill is the other side of that hole."

"Yes."

"You know his game, I suppose?"

"Kinder."

"Well, you want to block it."

"Yes."

"You know how?"

"Yes."

"When he puts the wire through, which he will do just before you get to the place, he will lay it right across the track about two feet from the ground."

"Think so?"

"Think so!" repeated Plunge, with a black frown. "Don't you know that is what he will do?"

"How should I know?"

"Look here, Kid."

"Wal."

"Are you trying to come up in this thing?"

"Do you up?" repeated Kid, with obvious evasion.

"Yes. Do me up. You know what I mean."

"I should know more if you would speak a little plainer, Cap. You jump on ter er feller without any warnin'. I can't tell what yer er thinking of," said Kid the Skipper, with an air of injured innocence.

"Never mind about my jumping on to you, as you call it; I want you to do as I tell you or it will be a bad job for you. I have a matter to settle with you as it is, and your only chance to make me deal lightly with you, is for you to obey me exactly and without question. Now do you understand me?" demanded Plunge with a frown of the darkest significance.

"I guess I do, Cap."

Kid the Skipper was thoroughly cowed now, and the trainer knew it.

"Very well, then. I will tell you over again what you are to do. Listen."

"I'm er-listenin'."

"When that rascal on the outside of the fence pushes that steel wire through the hole, he will stretch it across the track about two feet from the ground."

"Yes."

"It is an old trick, that I have seen worked successfully once or twice in the course of my experience on the turf."

"So have I."

The trainer smiled superciliously.

"Oh, you have, eh?"

"Yes."

"Ah! You are not quite so ignorant of such matters as you were a few minutes ago."

"I'm er learnin', Cap," responded Kid, with a peculiar grin.

"A good thing for you. Well, when that wire is held in that way, with a horse galloping at full speed against it the wire is nearly sure to become entangled in the horse's legs. Then there is either a tumble, or the wire cuts the legs so badly as to practically retire him from the track for an indefinite period."

"Yes."

"You understand that, do you?"

"Oh, yes; I understand that."

"Very well. Now, that is what will happen to Black Devil unless you prevent it."

"How am I to prevent it?"

"By simply jumping him over it."

"But—Snide Bill is sharp, and—"

"Yes?" put in the trainer, as Kid hesitated.

"Go on with what you were going to say."

"Why, I wuz goin' ter say that Snide Bill would raise the wire when he saw ther hoss jumpin', and catch him anyhow."

"You must take your chances with regard to that, Kid."

"But—see hyar, Cap, couldn't yer jist ez well let some uv ther boys go out thar an' snake Bill in, so ez thar wouldn't be no 'casion fer all this hyar bizness? I tell yer flat, Cap, I don't like it."

"Perhaps not, but you have to do it," returned Plunge Thornton coolly.

"And you're er-goin' ter let Snide Bill lame this hyar hoss an' kill me, eh, Cap?" asked Kid the Skipper, plaintively.

"Yes, unless you prevent it by obeying me."

"It's pretty durned hard, I think."

"Can't help that, Kid. Do you not think it was rather hard on me to be dragged across several miles of country with my head in a sack in my own buggy, and be made a prisoner in my own house by my own men, that I have spent several years of my time over in keeping them out of the Penitentiary? Don't you think that is rather hard on me, Kid?"

For the first time Plunge Thornton spoke with a certain bitterness about the events of the previous night, his manner being altogether different to that with which he generally gave his orders, and which was stern, without showing particular vindictiveness toward any one. Kid recognized the difference at once, and he ceased grumbling forthwith.

"Ready, Kid?" asked Plunge loudly.

"Yes."

"Go, then. Use your whip on that fellow."

Kid obeyed the injunction without hesitation by giving Black Devil a cut with the whip that made the horse jump straight into the air and buck like any broncho on the Western plains. Then, shaking his head, in obedience to a signal from Kid, whom he had already recognized as his master, he dashed around the track at the top of his speed.

For three or four hundred yards his rider let him have his way. Then he put all the strength of his arms into the work of restraining the impetuosity of the black brute, and before the half-mile was one-fourth covered, Black Devil was cantering comfortably around the track.

Plunge had gone up into the judge's box, where he could lean forward and note all that took place on any part of the track.

His eye was fixed upon the little hole in the fence on the other side of which he knew that Snide Bill was on the watch. The fence was a thick one, and the joining of the boards was covered carefully throughout with narrow strips of wood so that it should be impossible for any one to look through.

The importance of the fence being thus tight can be easily understood when it is remembered what immense sums are involved in horse-races, and how important it is sometimes to keep from the outside world the exact abilities in the way of making time of some of the famous race-horses.

The knot-hole—which, by the way, Plunge had just discovered, was not a knot-hole at all, but an opening made by a center-bit and brace from the outside—was the only point of espial all around the track; and this would not be in existence after to-day, as the trainer assured himself.

The horse and his rider were coming leisurely down the homestretch, preparatory to increasing the pace to a tremendous run upon reaching the wire, when Plunge saw something like a streak of sunlight stretch from the hole nearly across the track. It was a piece of steel, nar-

row and flat, with two knife-like edges, which would cut a horse's leg clear to the bone should they happen to run across it.

"The rascal! He is determined to do the job if he can. Well, it will make it all the easier for me when it really has to be done," muttered Plunge.

Black Devil had almost reached the string now, and Kid gave him another cut with his whip that made him dart forward as if he had been discharged from a cannon.

"Now, Kid!" yelled Plunge, his excitement momentarily getting the better of his caution. "Jump him as high as you can."

Kid, with teeth set, gathered up the reins in his left hand. He saw the flashing piece of steel just before him, and knew that now was the time that Black Devil must leap as perhaps he had never leaped before.

He raised himself in the stirrups, and gave an encouraging chirrup to his horse.

Black Devil seemed himself to have some idea of the danger that threatened him, for he doubled his forelegs under him, and seemed to be putting all his strength into the endeavor to clear the shining band that threatened him with he knew not what.

"Over, Devil!" shouted Kid.

The horse did his best, but—he was no match for the fiend outside the fence.

Snide Bill comprehended from the shouts of Plunge and Kid the Skipper that they had detected his trick and were trying to overcome it. He deliberately raised the steel as Black Devil tried to clear it.

The end of the steel, which was stiff, notwithstanding that the extreme length of the whole riband caused it to bend, struck the animal in the body, just inside one of his fore legs. The sharp pain caused him to lose the power of his leap just as he arose from the ground, and he fell back, with the cruel steel twisted all about him.

The next instant, he was rolling on his back, with both his forelegs broken, and the end of the steel still sticking into him, while Kid the Skipper, too good a jockey to be easily caught by a falling horse, and who had jumped clear at the right moment, was holding the bridle at arm's length, waiting until Black Devil's struggles should cease to a degree that would admit of an examination of his injuries.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MILE DASH.

PLUNGE THORNTON was out of the judge's box almost before the disaster had occurred, and was speeding toward the outer gate of the inclosure, revolver in hand, with revenge written all over his dark face.

He could have set some of his men to watch Snide Bill had he desired to do so, but he did not wish for any assistance in this matter. He preferred to do it all himself.

He reached the gateway and rushed headlong toward the spot where Snide Bill should have been outside the fence.

But he was not there!

The wire was still sticking through the hole in the fence, but Snide Bill was nowhere to be seen. The track stood in the midst of a farming country, which consisted of great fields, at this time of the year high with grain in all directions. It would be easy for a man to secrete himself among it in any of the fields near the spot on which Plunge stood, and, as if nature were determined to give all the assistance in its power to any fugitive in the neighborhood, there was a strip of woods close by, with swampy land through it, in which a man might hide for a year, safe from ordinary pursuit, provided he had provisions.

Plunge Thornton was not in the habit of giving himself up to vain regrets.

He looked around, and saw at once that Snide Bill was beyond his reach for the present.

"I might have known it, too," he muttered.

"The fellow is too cunning to be easily caught, and he would never have taken his chances on staying about at all if he had not had it all laid out for escaping in a hurry. Leonard Thornton, you are fooled again. You seem to be in particularly bad luck just now."

He looked up and down the dusty road that divided the inclosure of his race-track from the field of oats on the other side, and shaking his head slowly, went back to his stables.

"How badly is he hurt, Kid?" he asked, as he approached the prostrate Black Devil, who was groaning in that pitiful way peculiar to horses when in great pain.

"He's er goner, Cap. Both legs broke," answered Kid, the Skipper, sorrowfully, for the unscrupulous man, who cared little for the sufferings of human beings, was completely unnerved by the sight of a horse's injuries.

Plunge walked around the horse, saw that his fore-legs were indeed both badly fractured, and then, putting the muzzle of his heavy revolver exactly opposite Black Devil's heart, pulled the trigger.

Bang! And the horse was dead. The trainer was not satisfied with one shot, however. He fired again and again, until six bullets were imbedded in his heart, and there was not the

shadow of a doubt that the job had been properly done.

"So! There is the end of a good horse, all through that contemptible skunk. Never mind, Bill Snyder! It is your turn now, but Leonard Thornton will catch up with you before you are a week older," he muttered to himself, as he went into Flash o' Light's stall to assure himself that no harm had befallen Colonel Wright's property.

He found Mose Lloyd busy around the steeple-chaser, who was once more dressed up in his blankets and hood, and who was fresher than usual after his gentle exercise upon the track.

"Whoa, my beauty!" Mose was saying, as he carefully adjusted Flash's clothing. "Dey was gwine ter try an' broke yer, was dey? Well, dey can't done it while Mose Lloyd was around. Now you heah me? Not much. Whoa-a! Gently. What for you try to bite my arm, eh? It was your play, wasn't it? Well, doan' do it again, chile. Mose doan' like it."

The horse had playfully caught the boy's arm in his teeth and shaken it gently, thus calling forth this mild remonstrance:

"Mose," croaked Plunge, in his harsh tones.

"Yes, sah."

"Get to your shanty and have your dinner. I don't want you for awhile. I will stay here with Flash for an hour."

"Yes, sah."

Although the boy spoke obediently enough, it was evident to Plunge that for some reason he did not wish to leave Flash o' Light's stable.

"Get out," commanded Plunge, resolutely.

Mose went away without any remonstrance, but with a troubled look that was not lost upon the trainer.

"Where's that fellow, Morton, I wonder?" muttered Plunge, as he followed the boy with his eyes. "Whenever I expect mischief of any kind I think he is mixed up in it. I don't believe he has anything to do with Snide Bill's rascality, but I do not acquit him of anything else."

He walked about Flash o' Light and looked at him thoughtfully. Then he strolled to the door of the stable, and saw that the body of the dead horse, Black Devil, had already been removed from the track and was being taken through the gateway of the inclosure in a large wagon for consignment to the nearest schindery.

Kid and Wilk, with the others, were throwing sawdust upon the track where the horse had been killed, and already all traces of the tragedy had been obliterated.

"Hyar's this steel what did all ther mischief," observed Kid, as he saw Plunge, bringing with him the flashing length of wire.

Plunge took it, and as he scanned it from one end to the other, he said something about Snide Bill that it would not have done that twisted-necked individual good to hear. It meant trouble for him of a more pronounced kind than he had ever met before.

The trainer kept the wire in his hand for a moment. Then he walked over to his private house, let himself in with a pass-key, and depositing the wire in his bedroom, came out again with the inscrutable expression of countenance peculiar to it.

"Kid, come here."

Kid, the Skipper, who, with Wilk, was standing about near Flash o' Light's stable, in anticipation of being called again, responded at once.

"I am bound to find out what this horse can do a mile in."

"Yes."

"And I'm going to find out now."

"Good."

"I want you to ride him around, and I do not propose to let any one know about his time but myself. You understand?"

"Yes."

"What do you understand?" asked Plunge, quickly.

"I understand that you do not want any of the stable-boys to see his performance."

"Right. Especially that colored boy, Mose."

"Sartinly."

"Wilk," cried Plunge, turning toward the Englishman, who was standing near, with his usual injured expression.

"What?"

"Come and see."

Wilk shambled over to Plunge, who directed him to go outside the inclosure and keep a sharp lookout for Snide Bill.

"If you see him, curse him!" exclaimed the trainer, with sudden fierceness. "Shoot him down!"

Wilk drew a revolver from his pocket with a vindictive grin, and there was no doubt in the mind of Kid the Skipper that his partner would shoot Bill without hesitation, provided he was given the slightest excuse.

Plunge Thornton thought differently, however, for he called Mose Lloyd to him, and quietly directed him to go outside the fence and watch Wilk, without the latter's seeing him, if he could manage it.

Plunge's plan of setting one person to watch another was one that he had always found to answer very well, because everybody in his em-

ploy was thereby kept in a state of terror that insured him good service. Or so he argued.

As soon as Mose had disappeared through the gateway, Plunge fastened the gate securely, and beckoned Kid into the steeple-chaser's stable. Here he assisted in removing the blankets and hood, and after rubbing the horse down again and giving him a drink of water, but not too much, helped to put on the saddle and bridle for a second time.

He led Flash out into the moonlight, after glancing down the row of stables to make sure that Kid had ordered all the men to stay indoors, and that they had obeyed him.

A motion to Kid, and that gentleman, already accoutered as he was, with whip and spurs, sprang into the saddle without assistance and waited for further orders.

"Canter him around once, eh?" asked Kid.

"No."

"No?" somewhat surprised.

"You heard what I said. He has had a mile canter, and that is enough. There can't be much stiffness in him now."

"Guess you're right."

"Thank you for your good opinion," responded Plunge, ironically.

"I didn't mean nothing."

Plunge suffered this remark to pass unnoticed, as he said:

"Walk him back to the three-quarter pole, and let him get his stride. Then take him the full mile. You understand?"

"Round the track twice?"

"Of course. It's a half-mile track, and two half-miles make a mile, don't they? Even you should know enough arithmetic for that," returned the trainer, with unconcealed impatience.

Kid did not say anything more. He knew the captain, as he generally termed him, was not in a very good temper, and that it would not be wise to provoke him too far.

"The idiots!" muttered Plunge, as he went toward the judge's box, glancing with an involuntary sigh at the spot on the track where the new sawdust reminded him that he had lost a fairly valuable horse through the treachery of Snide Bill.

He took his place in the judge's stand and saw that Kid was slowly walking Flash o' Light up the homestretch to the place from which he was to start.

"Now to know just what the Flash can do," he murmured, as he took out his stop-watch, and prepared to set the lever at the second that Flash o' Light's nose reached the string stretched across the track from the judge's box to the pole opposite.

"Here he comes!"

Sure enough, Kid had, with all the skill of a well-trained jockey, touched up the beautiful black horse on the homestretch, till now, as he reached the wire, he was going like the wind, and yet held well in hand.

There was a rush, like a hurricane, as Flash sped past, but Plunge had touched the lever of his stop-watch at the proper moment, and had the speed of the horse right in his hand, as it were.

Round went the horse, Plunge watching every stride, and noting, as coolly as if he had no interest in the trial, just how much reserved strength there was in the horse even when racing at his best speed.

Half a mile done in fifty-five seconds!

"Good! Kid!" shouted the trainer. "Don't force him! The same for the other half!"

Kid did not make any sign. He could not, even if he had wished to do so, for all his attention was taken up with the management of his horse. He knew just what to do, and the warning from the trainer was unnecessary.

"By heavens! He is a great one!" muttered the trainer between his teeth, as he saw how easily Flash o' Light was sweeping around the track. "Pity to spoil him! Pity to spoil him!"

His teeth became set tighter then even as the horse neared the homestretch. The stop-watch showed that he was making better time on the second half-mile than on the first, and that, too, without the least sign of distress. Flash o' Light was hardly winded.

"Come on, Kid! Come on," he yelled, in an excitement that now came over him in spite of himself. There was an end to his self-repression when a horse behaved as magnificently as this.

Thundering down the homestretch, he saw that Flash o' Light was really a wonder.

"Why, he will do the mile in a minute and a half, even on a slow half-mile track," he gasped.

Kid was fired with the ambition that evidently ran through every nerve of the noble beast he rode, for he suddenly let out the reins and giving a chirrup of encouragement, put on a spurt with Flash that would have seemed impossible, considering the tremendous pace already reached.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Come on, Kid!"

Plunge Thornton was dancing about in his little wooden hut in a frenzy, when—

A large stone was thrown over the fence from the outside straight in the track of Flash o' Light.

Kid saw it while yet in the air, and by a

piece of masterly horsemanship, swerved the animal and making him dash around in a half-circle, sent him flying up the homestretch again before he could overcome the momentum he had gained in coming down.

The record that he would have made for a mile dash was lost by the villainy of some one outside, but Flash o' Light was saved.

CHAPTER XXIV.

JOE MORTON'S CONFESSION.

It was early in the morning of the day on which the trainer was trying the paces of Flash o' Light on his private race-track, that Joe Morton walked leisurely up the lawn at the back of Colonel Wright's residence on Euclid avenue.

There was a certain springiness in the young man's step, denoting that he was pleased over something, and the glint in his steel-blue eyes was more pronounced than usual. He evidently was the bearer of news to his employer that he felt sure would please him.

The door of Colonel Wright's private room—the room with which the reader should be pretty familiar by this time—was open, and the colonel himself could be seen inside at his desk, writing in a thoughtful manner.

"Good-morning, colonel."

The colonel looked up hastily, and seeing who it was, arose from his chair, and walked to the doorway.

"Well, Joe?"

"Can I come in?"

"Certainly. Any particular news?"

He spoke in a certain hopeless way, as if he did not look for anything that would raise the load upon his heart very much.

Joe Morton noticed it, and smiled reassuringly.

"I think I have some particular news."

The colonel looked at him eagerly, and his hand that he had rested on the banister of the porch, trembled.

Morton ran lightly up the stairs, and as the colonel stepped into the room, followed him and shut the door.

Then, as the colonel dropped into his swinging office-chair, the detective took another, and drawing it up near that of his employer, looked him full in the eyes.

"Well?"

"Colonel Wright, before I go any further about the matter in which I see you expect information, let me explain certain things that I feel it necessary you should know at this time."

"Certain things?" repeated the colonel, with a puzzled air.

"Yes. I should have told you before, but I did not think the time was ripe."

"Well?"

"In the first place, when you engaged me to assist in your stables some time ago, you asked me what I had been doing before I came here, and you seemed rather desirous to know something about my antecedents."

"No more than I should ask of any one I employed."

"Exactly. But I told you that the letter of recommendation I brought from General Dumont, in New York, was all I could give you, and that while I desired to enter your service, I could only do so on the understanding that I was to be judged by my work, and that my private history was not to be questioned. I assured you that I was not ashamed of it, that General Dumont's recommendation was *bona-fide*, and that I would eventually tell you all about myself, if my terms were accepted by you."

"Yes."

"You were satisfied with those terms?"

"Well, no, not altogether. But you were so plain and straightforward, and there was something so taking in your appearance, that I waived all the objections I may have had to the mystery, and took you anyhow. And, I will say, Joe Morton, that you have never since given me cause to regret my confidence in you."

The young man bowed.

"But," continued Colonel Wright, "I have always, since you have been in my employ, felt considerable curiosity regarding you. Are you going to tell me this morning who and what you are?"

"Yes."

"Good. I am glad to hear that."

The young man looked cautiously about the room, and then bending down to the colonel's ear, whispered a few words.

"What?" exclaimed Colonel Wright, starting.

"Do you mean to say that you—"

"Hush!" whispered the other, holding up his finger warningly. "Walls have ears."

"Not here. There are no ears save those of Ada, and they cannot hear us here."

"I do not care if they do, for Miss Ada already knows what I have told you."

"What—that you are—"

"Ronald Montgomery, of the New York Secret Police Force, nicknamed the Jockey Detective."

The young man spoke his full title rather proudly, perhaps. He knew it was an honor-

able one, and he may be forgiven for not being ashamed of it.

"Well, this is strange news, Joe—Mr.—"

"Keep on calling me Joe, colonel. My business here is not finished yet, and will not be until Flash o' Light has won that steeple-chase. I am going to see that thing through."

"But—what is your object in coming here and doing menial work about my stable, Joe?"

"It suited my purpose. I have been after a gang of thieves working in Cleveland, and I particularly desired to catch the ringleader with proof upon him. I think I have almost succeeded. I can let the sword fall upon him at any time, but I am going to wait a little while. There is no hurry now. Moreover, I find that the gang has wider operations than I at first believed, and that it includes people whom I hardly suspected of complicity, although I knew their general character did not rank very high."

"Ah!"

"And now, Colonel Wright, for a secret that I hope you will accept in a spirit of toleration, at least."

"What is it?"

The detective had hitherto been talking in an easy way, as if fully the equal of his companion. He was the man of business, combined with the shrewd detective, whose knowledge of men and things enabled him to maintain his part of the interview without trouble. But now he hesitated and stammered like a bashful girl.

"What is the matter, Joe?"

"Matter?"

"Yes."

"Oh, nothing. But—er—you—see—"

"Well?"

"You see, colonel—"

The young man coughed violently, as if he had some obstruction in his throat that he must get rid of before he could find tongue to utter what was in his mind.

"You see, colonel," he repeated.

But he evidently had not coughed enough, for his voice had not come back to him yet.

"Bad cough, eh, Joe?" observed the other dryly.

"Well, yes, colonel. It's a sort of tickling in my throat, that I cannot get rid of, somehow. But as I was saying colonel, I—I—"

"Well."

"I love your daughter."

"What—a-a-t?"

The colonel jumped from his chair, and his countenance, that a moment before, had been mantling with a careless, good-humored smile, became livid with rage.

The young man, notwithstanding that he had stammered so painfully in making his confession, had recovered himself completely now, and faced Colonel Wright's rage without flinching.

"Colonel Wright, my name is Ronald Montgomery and I love your daughter, Ada," he said, calmly.

"And—and—this was the business that brought you into my house was it? You mean to say that while pursuing your detective work—if it is true that you are a detective—you have been tampering with the affections of my daughter?"

At this moment a dainty figure in white glided into the room, and the arms of Ada Wright were around her father's neck.

"Papa!"

Colonel Wright has often said since that he cannot account for the influence that single word in his daughter's voice had upon him. Certain it is, however, that no sooner had Ada thus appealed to him in this simple way, than he sat down in his arm-chair, with her arms about him and listened patiently to all that Joe Morton (for so we shall continue to call him), had to say.

He made no comment while the detective explained that he met Ada in society in New York during her visit there the previous winter. That he was the son of rich and influential people—the Montgomeries, of Murray Hill, and that he was fully the equal of Colonel Wright in social standing, and that he was a detective only because he liked it for its excitement and because he had a natural aptitude for it. At last, when the young man had concluded his explanation, Colonel Wright asked:

"And does Ada know that you—"

He stopped. He did not like to say too the obnoxious word—obnoxious, that is as it concerned his daughter.

But Ada helped him out of his hesitation, for she freely confessed:

"Yes, papa, Ada does know that—that—Joe thinks I am—nice. He—he—has told me—so—and—I—"

"Well? You—what?"

"I told him that I—thought—he was—nice," hanging her head and concealing her face on her father's shoulder.

Colonel Wright's expression of perplexity was a study. At last, as if with a violent effort, he put out his hand, and Joe Morton grasped it with an eagerness that he did not often display over anything.

"Joe, when Flash o' Light has won that race we will speak about this matter again. In the mean time," he continued, holding up his hand to

prevent the young man speaking—"In the mean time, I trust to your honor not to speak to my daughter on the subject until I give you permission."

"Papa—"

"Silence, Ada. Joe, is it a bargain?"

The young man looked at the young girl clinging so trustingly to her father, and at the troubled face of Colonel Wright, and then, holding out his hand again, said:

"It is a bargain."

The two shook hands upon it, and Joe Morton, notwithstanding that he felt as if it would be an age before the steeple-chase was over, and he could broach the subject nearer his heart than anything else, experienced a thrill of joy such as he had not known for months.

Ada still stood leaning over her father, when the detective, resuming his ordinary business tones, but still with a glad light in his blue eyes, said:

"Colonel Wright, I have one other thing to speak to you about this morning."

"Yes?"

"Yes. It is found."

"Found?"

Only one word, but with such a ring as proved that he knew what the "it" was.

"Yes, colonel. Here it is."

The detective had been fumbling inside his vest, and as he spoke, he drew from his inner pocket—the emerald.

How Colonel Wright grasped the jewel, turned it over and over, looked at it from every point of view, locked it up in his desk in the first transports of his joy at its recovery, took it out again, gave it to Ada, took it from her, shook hands with Joe, and acted in a thousand ways as if he were actually crazy, it is not necessary to tell. Suffice it to say, that he calmed down at last, and putting the emerald, still in its diamond setting as a brooch, in Ada's dress at her throat, looked at Joe and asked:

"How did you get it?"

The detective smiled.

"How did you get it, Joe?"

It was Ada who repeated the question, and it was Ada who blushed as she spoke. The young man's name with an intonation peculiar to a young girl who loves the owner of the name she pronounces.

The detective looked up quickly. It was sweet to his ears to hear Ada speak to him by his name—even though the name was only that to which he was known to fame as one of New York's shrewdest detectives.

"I got it," he answered, quietly, "from the fellow that I suspected of possessing it, and that I had been tracking for several days."

"Ah!"

"Yes. But, strangely enough, the man who had been the original thief had been robbed by another one, and he in his turn was robbed by the original."

"Strange!" observed the colonel.

"Yes, and, moreover, I had to exercise a taste for mimicry that I have always possessed, and that has been useful to me more than once in my chosen profession."

"Mimicry?"

"Yes. What do you think of this: Ob, nein, mein tear, I was a frient of Isenstein, der pawn-broker, und I gif you two tollar for der shewel, if it worth ten thousand tollar, don'd you know."

The snuffle with which the detective said these words was exactly that of "Mr. Isenstein's representative," and he would have been recognized at once by Snide Bill, Kid and Wilk, if they had heard him, even though he had no cloak or any other part of the disguise in which they had seen him the night before.

Colonel Wright and Ada laughed heartily at the imitation, and then the detective unfolded to the former a certain arrangement already made by which the true value of the emerald could be learned by its rightful owner, the development of which will be followed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXV.

SHARP CLAWS READY TO STRIKE.

DR. HEZEKIAH FULTON sat in his private parlor in his quiet house, stroking his long whiskers and reading an old book by the light of the powerful electric bulb on the table by his side.

The doctor rather prided himself on being an original, and since he knew enough about science to carry out peculiar ideas and was never held back in his researches by lack of money he had about as mysterious and interesting a life of it as any medical gentlemen in Cleveland.

Even now he looked as happy as a boy at play. He was reading a dry old tome on the subject of cancers—not a very joyous one to most people—and he was chuckling away in the most delightful way. Since the book was written there had been so much learned about the nature of this particular ailment and so many new methods of treating it had been discovered, that Dr. Fulton could well afford to call the author an old fool for his silly notions, without fearing that he might return from the grave to defend himself.

"What a ninny, to suppose that cancer could be treated successfully by such a method," he muttered, deeply absorbed in his book. "Why the veriest dunce in his first year at college knows better than that nowadays. Well, well. We are finding out more the older the world grows, of course. Perhaps, if I had lived when this book was written I might have held the same opinions as its author. You never can tell. You never can tell."

"Ting!"

A bell, silvery-toned and soft, had sounded at his elbow.

"Halloa! What's that? Visitors? What's the time. He put his forefinger to a scarcely distinguishable brass knob, like the head of a small nail, at the edge of the table near which he sat, and straightway two metal figures sprang up from the center of the table, where the effulgence of the electric bulb struck full upon them.

"Why! As late as that, eh?"

The two figures were a six and a cipher. He touched the brass knob again, and they disappeared as swiftly and noiselessly as they had come.

"Six o'clock. And I have been sitting here for over an hour. It did not seem ten minutes to me. This old fellow with his exploded theories about cancer must be more interesting than I gave him credit for being."

He touched another knob near the one connecting with his novel electrical timepiece and listened. A close scrutiny of the edge of the table would have revealed that he had a perfect battery of electric buttons on the edge of his table, by means of which he could enjoy more of the conveniences of his home without leaving his chair. Dr. Fulton was a man of science of the most practical description.

Very soon he heard footsteps in the hall outside the parlor, and then there was a tap at the half-open door.

"Come!"

Joe Morton appeared, followed by Colonel Wright and Ada. The doctor arose and bowed the girl to a chair. Hardly had he done so when another "ting!" from the silvery bell warned him of the approach of another visitor.

"I will trouble you to step into the next room for a moment. I do not know who this is at the gate, but it may be some one whom it might not be well for you to meet at present in view of the business we have to transact," said the doctor, in a matter-of-fact way.

As he spoke he opened a door behind him, revealing a richly-furnished parlor, with an open piano, a vase of flowers on the marble-top table, and a general atmosphere of delicacy that indicated its occupancy not long before by a lady.

The colonel and his daughter stepped inside, and the doctor closed the door, the action fastening it at the same time so that the inmates could not have released themselves had they desired to do so—a fact of which they were unaware, however.

The detective had not attempted to follow them, and he now retired into the alcove or room, whichever it might be, behind the swinging skeleton that had concealed him on a former occasion.

Hardly had he got out of sight, when the new-comer marched straight into the doctor's room, without going through the formality of knocking at the door.

Snide Bill!

The head groom looked worried. His head was turned further than usual to the left, and his shoulders were so high that he seemed to have actually no neck at all. His eyes were bloodshot, as if he had been losing sleep, and he glanced hither and thither in a furtive way that indicated he had been dodging somebody or something for the last day or two—as, indeed, the reader knows he had.

"Good-morning, sir," said the doctor, urbanely.

Snide Bill, elevating his broken nose in disgust, and squinting about the room in his most disagreeable manner, answered gruffly:

"Don't see how yer kin call this mornin', past six o'clock in ther evenin'. But some uv you fellers hev ther queerest notions I ever see."

He plumped himself down in a wooden chair standing just before the swinging skeleton, but jumped up quickly, with a howl, as if the seat of the chair were red hot.

"What—what—what!" he spluttered, between rage and fear being scarcely able to speak. "What in thunder is ther matter with thet thar chair?"

The doctor smiled grimly.

"That chair? Oh, yes. You see, sir, you accidentally sat in my magnetic chair that I use for patients suffering from nervous depression. There happens to be a full charge of power in it just now—much more than I generally use. It will not do you any harm."

"No harm!" repeated Snide, scowling.

"Oh, no. It will have a soothing effect when the first irritation has worn off. It is rather a heroic remedy for the blues but it is nearly always efficacious. Sit down again, you will like it better the second time."

Nothing could exceed the doctor's politeness, but the mischievous twinkle in his eye would have told a more obtuse individual than Snide Bill that the second dose would most likely be stronger than the first.

"No, doctor, I don't want no more ov yer magnetism. What I came about is to know what yer kin tell me about er certain jewel ez I wuz robbed uv by er durned old Sheeny."

"Hush! hush! my dear sir. I must protest against that coarse allusion to a race among which I number many honored acquaintances."

The doctor spoke coldly, and even sternly, and Snide Bill humbly begged his pardon.

Somehow, it seemed to Bill that everybody snubbed him, and he could not help himself. He was becoming disgusted with everything, particularly with himself.

"Wal, what about ther jewel? I got a letter addressed ter me at—at—my home—"

"At the stables of Colonel Wright's residence on Euclid avenue, eh?" put in the doctor, quietly.

"How do you know?" asked Snide Bill, suspiciously. "Did you send ther letter?"

"No."

"Then how did you know it came to ther stables?"

"Never mind. I have a way of finding out these little things. Go on with your very interesting narrative."

Dr. Fulton was sitting in his own easy-chair, facing the swinging skeleton, with Snide Bill in another chair—which he had only taken on the solemn assurance of the doctor that it was not magnetized—facing him, so that his back was toward the skeleton.

Snide Bill wriggled uneasily in his seat, for he felt that he was under cross-examination, and he did not like it. It reminded him of being in a court-room with a sharp lawyer turning him inside out.

"Wal," he resumed, "a letter came ter me this morning—"

"This morning? Sure it did not come yesterday?"

Again Bill wriggled uncomfortably under the steady glance of the inscrutable being before him, and answered, sullenly:

"I wuz not at home last night."

"Oh!"

"But when I got home this morning, I found ther letter, telling me ter come hyar an' I might larn somethin' er other 'bout ther emerald."

"Was the letter signed?"

"No."

"Ah!"

The way in which Dr. Fulton said "Ah!" was not reassuring to Snide Bill, and that twisted-necked, bow-legged hero felt more at a disadvantage than ever.

"Ting!"

Once more the silver bell.

Snide Bill looked inquiringly at the doctor, who smiled benignly in response.

"Mr. Snyder—"

"Who told yer my name?" interrupted Bill, in intense surprise.

"Why, you innocent darling, do you suppose that I would allow you to come here, into my private room, especially out of office hours, and talk to me for five or ten minutes, if I did not know your name? Yes, Mr. William Snyder, I know you, and could tell you a great deal about yourself. For instance, when you were in New Orleans—"

"Never mind about that," interrupted Bill, hastily.

"Ting!"

The silvery bell rung again.

"Mr. Snyder, oblige me by stepping into this recess, where you will not be seen by this visitor, whoever he is. I do not care to let my business with one caller be known to another."

"But I shall hear what this new party says, sha'n't I?" asked Bill, with a leer.

"Perhaps."

The doctor pointed to a heavy curtain that hung before a small alcove on his right, and Snide Bill, without more ado, stepped behind it.

Then the doctor pressed the small brass knob that opened the front gate and the door leading to the retreat, and sat quietly in his easy-chair waiting for the latest comer to make his appearance.

"Well, doctor. Here I am."

Snide Bill could hardly keep himself from pushing aside the curtains to look at the speaker. Then he felt as if he wanted to hide himself in the furthest corner of the recess, or even to drop down into the cellar, to get away from the man who had just spoken.

Well he knew those gruff tones, and he would sooner have heard any others at the present juncture.

Plunge Thornton!

Yes, the trainer was there, in Dr. Fulton's sanctum, and within arm's length of him were four people whose presence would have startled him considerably had he been aware of it.

"Well, Mr. Leonard, you are here on time."

"Yes."

"Have you the jewel with you?"

The trainer's brow, already clouded, became black as night.

The doctor repeated his question, and the trainer gritted his teeth as he hissed:

"No."

"Indeed! How is that? What is the use of your coming without it?"

"Why, I thought you said that it had already revealed to you the secret contained in the cipher in the Seventh Book of the Crescent. Besides, did you suppose that I would bring the emerald here again, after my last experience, with that fellow, whoever he was, in the long cloak, and—"

"And what?"

"Why, your apparent attempt to make me a prisoner."

"Pooh! Mr. Leonard. That was your own fault. You chose to quarrel with my assistant, here, who was in his ordinary working dress."

"Working dress?"

"Yes. He always wears a long robe and a mask while working among chemicals. So would you if you had to do with such dangerous substances, where the mixing of one colorless liquid with another will sometimes produce an explosive powerful enough to blow up a whole town. You would be willing to wear protective clothing."

"But why did you prevent my going out?"

"I did not do so. You reached the front door and it was fastened. Well, it always is, until I choose to open it from here. You did not have to wait more than a few seconds, did you?"

The trainer looked thoughtfully at Dr. Fulton for a moment, and then acknowledged that the bar to his egress had been only temporary.

"But—what about the assistant, as you call him? Did I not hurt his hand badly when I bit it?"

"I do not know. I will call him and ask."

He put out his hand as if to press one of the brass knobs in connection with his complicated electrical apparatus, but Plunge stopped him.

"Never mind. I am satisfied, if he is."

The doctor smiled, as he looked carelessly over the head of the trainer at Joe Morton, who had shown himself behind the skeleton, shaking his fist at the unconscious speaker.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SNYDER CUTS THE WIRES.

"You say you have not got the jewel with you?" went on Dr. Fulton, after a pause, during which he seemed to be lost in reflection, while Plunge Thornton watched him sharply.

"I have not, doctor. I thought it better not to bring it. I should not have been here this evening, only that you called after me when the front door opened the last time I had the pleasure of meeting you, to drop in at this time, and you would probably give me the information I wanted about the emerald. Now, if you will do so, I shall be glad. If you won't, I must get along without your help."

"I cannot give it to you without the emerald, I'm afraid. But let us talk about something else. How is Colonel Wright's horse, Flash o' Light, doing?"

"Very well," answered Plunge, shortly.

"Sure to win that race?"

"Nothing is sure in this world."

"What about Captain Wood's Loafer?"

"If Flash o' Light does not win, Loafer will," answered the trainer. "Everybody knows that. There is nothing else entered that has the ghost of a chance. It is a very stiff course—three miles over hurdles, water fences, both high and sunk, and a stiff hill for the finish. It will take a horse of tremendous staying power to see the finish."

"Ah! Couldn't you make Flash o' Light lose?"

The doctor was looking straight at Plunge, and yet his eye met that of the detective over his head at the same time.

"What do you mean? Do you think I'm crooked, that you ask me such a question?" demanded Thornton, with an assumption of virtuous indignation.

"Never mind. You are training Flash o' Light, are you not?"

"Well, what of it? Yes, I am!"

"You want to marry Ada Wright?"

"Doctor—"

"Don't get excited, now. Answer my question. It will pay you to do so."

The power that Dr. Fulton exercised over Plunge was something the same as the trainer held over other people, and the man who would have given a great deal at that moment to find himself safely in the street, answered because he could not help it.

"If I do want to marry Ada Wright, what then? It is my own business, I suppose."

"Perhaps. Make Flash o' Light lose that steeple-chase and I will help you to win her."

The detective had now come out completely from behind the swinging skeleton, and he seemed as if he were about to interfere, when the doctor, with a motion so slight as to be quite unobserved by the trainer, stopped him.

"And the jewel? Will you explain its meaning to me?"

"If you produce the jewel."

The trainer scowled.

"I cannot do that," he said. "It is at home."

"Bring it to-morrow. In the mean time, what about Flash o' Light?"

"You will help me to win Ada, you say? Can you do it, do you think?"

"I can."

"Well, then. I will talk to you about Flash to-morrow."

"Why not to-day?"

"Because I must have time to think about it."

"But you think you will do it—I mean, fix Flash so that he will lose?"

"Yes."

Again the detective shook his fist at the unconscious Plunge, and again the doctor made that almost imperceptible motion to him to keep out of sight.

The detective obeyed by going into his little room, or whatever the place was, behind the skeleton, and was seen no more—for a while.

"Well, now, Plunge, I will tell you something more. You haven't got that emerald."

"What?"

"Oh, do not pretend that you have. I know all about it. You have lost that emerald."

For a moment the trainer looked at the smiling doctor, open-mouthed. Then he slapped his knee and drew a long breath of utter astonishment.

"Well, you beat the Devil!" he ejaculated, at last.

"Meaning yourself, eh? Well, perhaps I do. But I tell you that you haven't got that emerald, and, moreover, I know where it is."

Plunge sprung from his chair as if he would tear out of the doctor all he knew, but the smiling gentleman only waived his hand, and the trainer sat down, resignedly. He had the desperate man at a disadvantage, and he knew it.

Here an unexpected phenomenon took place.

The heavy curtain, at the right of the doctor, and the left of Plunge, swung out, as if a stiff wind behind had blown it into the room, and the folds wrapped themselves partly around the trainer's neck, falling away again directly, however.

Plunge started up, and before the doctor could prevent him, pulled the curtain away.

The alcove was revealed—empty!

"Well, what made that curtain come out that way? I could have sworn I felt a man's hand through it when it came flying against me," averred Plunge, as his dark countenance took on a greenish hue.

"Nonsense!"

"No, it is not nonsense!" returned the trainer, shaking his head, solemnly. "I tell you what it is, Doctor Fulton, I believe I will not trouble you about my affairs any more. I do not like your place nor your way of doing business, with skeletons, and mysterious curtains, and fellows in masks and long cloaks, and the deuce knows what. It is not Christian-like."

The trainer spoke earnestly, and it was evident that he was really frightened. The doctor only laughed and stroked his long beard in that soothing way peculiar to him.

"Good-evening, doctor."

Plunge arose from his chair.

"You admit that you have not got that emerald?"

For an instant the trainer looked into the calm blue eyes of his tormentor. Then the dark brows met over the nose, making Plunge's countenance more forbidding than usual, and, with a yell of rage, he had thrown himself upon the doctor and forced him to the floor.

The attack was the signal for the little parlor to be invaded by two persons, who, with one accord seized the trainer and dragged him back in no gentle manner.

Jaunty Joe Morton, the detective, and Colonel Wright.

"You rascal!" thundered the colonel. "You have overreached yourself this time."

"Have I? Remember what I told you about the mine. I will ruin you if you do not get me out of this," hissed Plunge in the colonel's ear.

The colonel released him, but the detective still retained his hold of the trainer's shoulder, while the doctor, straightening himself in his chair, smoothed his beard calmly and looked on as if the proceeding were no personal concern of his.

Plunge gave himself a shake, and the detective let go. Perhaps the trainer thought his own strength had shaken off the detective's hand, but had he been able to see behind him he would have noted that Ada Wright stood in the doorway leading to the adjoining parlor, and that she had cast one supplicating glance at Joe that he would not have disregarded for his very life. It was an appeal to him to go no further against the trainer, for her father's sake.

Thornton stood sullenly by the side of his overturned chair, looking sarcastically from the detective to his employer.

"Well, gentlemen, if you have done with me I will take myself off. I have business at my stables. I suppose you think it is the proper thing to play eavesdropper at a private conversation. It may be your idea of honor. I have nothing to do with that. Good-evening."

"Wait a moment, my friend," interposed the doctor, with his serenest smile. "What about that emerald?"

"Yes, what about that thar emerald?" burst in another voice, as Bill Snyder suddenly appeared from behind Dr. Fulton's chair, and, wriggling himself to the front, looked sideways at the trainer with an expression of the deepest malevolence.

"Halloa! You here, you scamp?" howled the trainer, as, with his open hand, he gave the head groom a slap that sent him flying against the detective, who in turn brushed him off as if he had been a very nasty insect.

Bill recovered his balance, and taking no particular heed of the buffets he had received, rushed up to the trainer again, and looking at him over his left shoulder in his usual way, repeated his question:

"What about that thar emerald?"

"You miserable worm! To talk to me about the emerald! Don't you know I have a good mind to have you arrested now and here for larceny and highway robbery?"

"Pooh!" sneered Bill, who seemed to have lost his usual fear of the trainer, in his rage over the loss of the matchless jewel.

"The gentleman with the oblique neck is right in his sentiments, in spite of the fact that he expresses them in a peculiar way," observed Doctor Fulton. "I should like to know from you:—What about that emerald?"

"That emerald is mine, and I do not feel called upon to answer your question."

"Liar!"

It was Colonel Wright who spoke, and he advanced threateningly as he did so.

Plunge Thornton stepped up to him, and grasping his wrist firmly, whispered in his ear: "Remember!"

At the same moment Ada, throwing her arms about her father's neck, spoke softly into his ear:

The colonel drew back, and folding his arms, stood watching the others without attempting to interfere.

"That thar en'rald wuz mine, an' you're er liar when yer say it wuz yourn. I agree with Colonel Wright in what he called yer," croaked Bill. "I b'lieve you an' that thar Jew wuz in cahoots, and thet yer put up ther job to rob me. Thet's what's ther matter, an' I know it."

Snyder was so mad that he actually howled aloud as a sort of wind-up to his speech, and, dodging around the trainer, put his hand to his inner pocket as if seeking for a weapon with which to avenge himself.

The detective was watching every movement with the sharpness of a hawk.

"Once more, I want to know something about that emerald," Doctor Fulton persisted, sitting back in his chair and composedly folding his fat white hands over his chest—a favorite attitude of his when he felt particularly satisfied with himself.

"And once more, I tell you that I have nothing to say to you about it," replied the trainer, sullenly.

The doctor nodded with the slightest possible motion toward the detective, who disappeared for a moment behind the swinging skeleton in the recess. He had hardly got out of sight when the skeleton was pushed aside again, and an old man, with long gray beard, and dressed in an old-fashioned long coat, and broad-brimmed hat, hobbled slowly into the room.

"Shentlemans, gut-evenin'! I hopes I sees you vell! It vas a nice evenin', shentlemans."

The voice was that of Isenstein's representative, the old Hebrew who had got the better of Snide Bill the night before at Thornton's stables!

"Ow!" howled Snide, as he pushed back the trainer, and tried to clutch the old man by the beard.

But he was not quick enough. The Jew was more agile than he looked, and, as Bill came toward him, he put out his fist and struck the head groom full in the chest, making him stagger.

"V'at you vant? V'at for you come against me, eh? You vas too fresh, ain't it?" he said, quietly.

"But, doctor, this—this—man stole my emerald! Stole it, I tell yer, an' run away with it," yelled Bill, in a frenzy.

"Your emerald?" put in Colonel Wright, with a scornful smile. "I should like to know how many people own that stone?"

"Give it to me, you old thief!" howled Bill, as he sprung at the old man again with something gleaming in his hand.

He had the something gleaming raised to strike, when, like a flash, the Jew drew something gleaming from his own clothing, and two knives clashed in mid-air.

The next moment Bill was lying on his back, and Jaunty Joe Morton, the detective, having cast aside his false beard and his long cloak, stood over the trembling wretch with both knives in his hands.

One had a buckhorn handle and the other a black handle. But both were of the same peculiar make, and had any one studied the blades closely he could have seen that upon each were the mysterious signs, 1426*.

"Bill Snyder, I arrest you for the murder of a sailor in New Orleans two years ago. Here is my warrant," said Jaunty Joe, as he held up an official paper with a red seal.

For a second or two every one in the room except the young man seemed to be literally paralyzed with surprise.

Then there was a rush and a struggle, the noise of a banging door and of retreating footsteps, as the room became enveloped in total darkness.

"Never mind, gentlemen! He will not go far!" exclaimed the doctor, in his most cheerful tones. But hardly were the words out of his mouth, when they were followed by others.

"By heavens! he has got ahead of us. He has cut the electric wires somehow, and escaped."

CHAPTER XXVII.

PLUNGE'S GRIP LOOSENED.

To explain the meaning of Dr. Fulton's words it is necessary to remind the reader that he controlled the fastenings of all the doors, together with the lights and other conveniences by electricity, the wires of the various devices centering in the table by the side of him, where a set of small brass buttons were ready to his fingers.

Bill had managed to cut the wires, and had thus gained means of access. Had the electrical apparatus been in working order, Dr. Fulton would easily have prevented his escape by the front door, at least.

It was not more than a minute before the doctor had another light from a separate battery, the dynamo in the cellar that controlled the principal lights and the electrical arrangements for fastening the doors, etc., being distinct from the one he now used.

"That is all right, colonel," observed the doctor quietly, replying to the unexpressed query of the other, as shown in his eyes. "I will soon restore the matter to working-order when I get rid of all you people."

"Which means, I suppose, that you want to get rid of us at once. Now, Joe, here— Why, where is he? He was standing at my side a moment ago," said the colonel, looking blankly at the place where the detective had been.

"Here I am, colonel!"

Jaunty Joe came into the room as he spoke, dragging with him by the coat-collar no less a person than Colonel Wright's head groom.

Snide was all twisted in every part, his neck being just now the straightest portion of his anatomy. He was scowling up at his captor, alternating his glances in that direction with others at a pair of bright steel handcuffs that encircled his wrists.

"Halloa! What's this?" demanded Dr. Fulton, cheerfully.

"I'll tell yer what it is. This hyar smart duck over Joe Morton hez made er bad mistake, an' he'll find it out afore long. Now you mark what I say," growled Snyder.

"Here is the emerald that I presume all these gentlemen have been talking about," remarked the colonel, after a pause, during which Bill seemed to think somebody would answer him, but in which he was disappointed.

He held up the jewel as he spoke, the electric light gleaming upon it, and showing off its brilliancy to the very best effect.

The sight was too much for Bill. Breaking away from the detective, he raised his manacled hands, and wrenched the jewel away.

He might have spared himself the trouble, for Jaunty Joe seized him again by the shoulder, and marching him to one side, took the emerald away from him without difficulty, and restored it to the colonel.

"Snide, if you don't keep quiet, I'll tie your ankles together, and have you hauled to the station-house in a wheelbarrow," said the detective, calmly. "I have had enough of your nonsense!"

"Well, doctor, I think I will say good-night. And now, Mr. Morton, since you have revealed your real profession to Mr. Thornton, I suppose you will not care to work in his stables any longer," observed the colonel, rather anxiously, glancing from the detective to the trainer, and back again.

"No, indeed, I do not want him. I do not care about having detectives around me."

"Why not?" put in Jaunty Joe, quick as a flash.

"Why not?" repeated the trainer. "Well, because I do not see what business they can have there. That is why not! What have you to say to that?"

There was just the sort of defiant ring in the tones of the trainer, that you may note in a pickpocket when caught in the act, and knowing that denial will do no good.

"I'll tell you what I have to say to that, Mr. Thornton. I am a friend of Colonel Wright's—"

"And of his daughter's too, perhaps," sneered Plunge.

"Yes, and of his daughter's, too, though I trust you are gentleman enough to leave her name out of this discussion. But, as I was about to say: I am interested in the success of Flash o' Light, and, with your permission, should like to work in your stable, and do what I could in helping to keep the horse in condition."

"Certainly, Plunge, I should like Mr. Morton to do so," added the colonel.

"I do not want him," growled Plunge, doggedly.

"But, Plunge, I want him to be there."

"I tell you I do not want him!"

"But I shall insist!"

"Oh, you will insist, will you? Then—I know what to do!"

"Papa!" whispered Ada, who was standing by her father's side, with her arm through his.

"Oh, very well, Plunge; if it gives you so much offense, I suppose we must let you have your own way. You know, Joe," turning to the detective, with a sickly smile very unlike his usually sturdy independence of manner, "the owner of a steeple-chaser is always at the mercy of his trainer."

"You are, at all events," muttered Plunge, under his breath, as he glanced vindictively at Ada, and saw how she watched the detective with an interest that, to his jealous eyes, told the tale he most hated to know—that Joe Morton was a successful rival in the girl's affections that he could never hope to displace.

"Very well, then, Mr. Wright, I will stay at your stables on Euclid avenue. I suppose this gentleman will not object to my visiting Flash o' Light with you."

The detective glanced contemptuously at the trainer, who returned the look with one of utter dislike, mingled with a little fear that he tried ineffectually to conceal.

"Where are you going now, Joe?" asked the colonel.

"To the Central Station, with this gentleman, and then to your house."

"Very well. And you, Mr. Thornton?"

"Back to my stables, to look after Flash o' Light."

"Good. I have a few words to speak to Dr. Fulton alone."

Plunge took the hint and vanished. The fastenings of all the doors and the gate were loose, as the doctor informed him, with a smile.

"Now, Snide."

"What?"

"Come along."

It was Jaunty Joe Morton who spoke, and there was an unwonted sternness in his tones that neither the colonel nor his daughter had ever heard before. It was the official tone of the detective to a prisoner, and, judging by the mechanical alacrity with which Bill moved, that twisted-necked individual understood the full significance of that sort of speech.

Joe took him by the arm with a firm grasp, and marched him out, and a moment later the colonel heard the front door close with a slam, while Ada hoped to herself that no harm would befall her lover, while thinking proudly how easily he had handled the prisoner, and hustled him away.

"Well, colonel, you have the emerald, and I do not think you will be bothered by those fellows again for awhile," observed the doctor, with a smile. "I think our friend Joe can manage the crooked gentleman, and as for Mr. —Mr. Leonard—I believe that is his name—why, you can easily manage him."

"Leonard?" said the colonel, absently. "Plunge Thornton, as he is generally called. The fool actually seemed to think I did not know him."

"But you did?"

"But I did," returned the doctor, with a smile.

"I do not know what to do about Plunge. You see, he has commenced the training of Flash, and he knows the horse so well, that I do not dare just now to take him out of his hands."

"I see," was the doctor's dry remark.

"So I suppose I must let Plunge keep Flash in charge until he starts in the steeple-chase, next month."

"Colonel Wright."

"Yes."

"You and I are old friends; are we not?"

The colonel's only response was a silent pressure of the other's hand.

"Well, then, I want you to tell me whether this man Thornton has not some real or fancied hold upon you, so that you give way to him when your manhood urges you to do otherwise."

"You are right, doctor. He has information concerning some mines in which I am interested that it would mean ruin to me if it were known to certain persons. He will reveal the secret to the opposition as sure as he is alive now if I offend him."

The doctor sat back in his chair with his hands before him, the tips of his ten fingers touching, smiling easily at the colonel.

"If you offend him, eh?" he repeated.

Colonel Wright nodded and absently stroked the hair of his daughter, as she sat in her chair, with downcast eyes, thinking of her lover and wondering what would be the outcome of the difficulty with Thornton. She had noticed a furtive look he bestowed upon her as he left the room, and she knew it meant mischief.

"If I offend him," repeated the colonel.

"The mines are the Gargoyle Silver Mines in Colorado, I believe?"

"Yes."

The colonel spoke with considerable astonishment. He had kept his connection with the

mines a profound secret where he could, and he certainly had no idea that it was known to Doctor Hezekiah Fulton.

"Colonel Wright, I am pleased to be able to tell you that the blind lead struck some time ago, and that you were afraid would come to the ears of the syndicate to whom you are indebted, has turned off into a rich lode. The Gargoyles are to-day the best-paying mines in Colorado, and you can pay off your indebtedness to-morrow, if you desire. You need not be afraid of the syndicate or Plunge Thornton, either."

For a few moments Colonel Wright was fairly stunned. Then he said:

"Doctor, are you sure of this?"

"Sure of it? Colonel Wright, I never told you before, but I am a stockholder in the Gargoyle Mines, and I have made it my business to keep very well informed upon all that is done there. I have a private dispatch from a man there who works secretly in my interest. As I need not tell you the turn of the lead has been kept from the general public, and even from those practically owning the mines. I received a dispatch only last night. Here it is."

He held out a yellow scrap of paper, which the colonel took, hastily glanced at, and handed back with a shrug of his shoulders.

"True, colonel, I had forgotten. It is in cipher. Well, I will translate it for you. It says: 'The new lode struck in the southeast of the Gargoyle, is richer than anything found in this part of Colorado before. It is evidently a lasting find. Signed, K.'"

While the doctor had been reading he had not looked toward the door leading to the hall. Neither had Colonel Wright or his daughter. If they had, they would have seen an evil face, with dark eyebrows bent over sharp eyes, put cautiously around the half-open door, about three feet from the floor.

It was the face of Leonard Thornton, and the rest of him, in a kneeling posture, was drawn up in a heap on the other side.

He was listening eagerly to the reading of the dispatch, and a dark cloud settled over his face as the doctor concluded. Then he withdrew into the shadow of the hall, out of sight, but still intently listening to the further conversation.

"Well, doctor, I can hardly realize that the Gargoyle has turned out so well. You do not know what it means to me."

"Yes, I do," put in Dr. Fulton, quietly.

"I suppose I can get all the money I need on my stock certificates, can I not? I mean at once?"

"At once, I should say," answered the doctor.

"Where are your certificates?"

"At my house, in my private safe."

"Careless!" commented Dr. Hezekiah, sententiously. "You should have them in the vault of a Safe Deposit Company."

"Oh, no; the safe is fire and burglar proof. Besides, I never expected them to be as valuable as they have since become. I knew that there was silver in the Gargoyle Mines, and I expected that it would help me out of my difficulties if I were given time. But I did not think it would come so soon or so richly."

"So. In his safe, are they? Well, well," muttered Plunge, behind the door. "In his safe. Ha!"

"Now, colonel, my advice to you is to get rid of Mr. Leonard Thornton, as soon as possible," continued the doctor.

Plunge, behind the door, grinned sarcastically.

"I will see what I can do. My principal purpose now, when I have got the Gargoyle matter properly arranged, and settled everything with the syndicate, is to insure Flash o' Light winning the steeple-chase."

"Is it? Well, we will see," muttered Plunge.

"I think to insure that, you had better not trust him to your present trainer. You need not fear him now. Let him try to play his hand against you, and you know that he will be beaten," said the doctor.

"Yes, I know that. But, still, if he will act honestly by Flash, as I think he will, for his own credit's sake, I would rather trust my horse to him than any one else. He is the best trainer in America, and can, if he will, put Flash o' Light on the track in perfect condition, and with victory for him certain."

"And his aspirations for your daughter's hand?" insinuated the doctor, with a smile.

Plunge did not wait to hear any more. The colonel's rage was severe enough to make even the trainer feel a little afraid, bold as he was in general. He scuttled quietly along the dark hall and out into the street (the breaking down of the electrical arrangements making his exit possible), the last words he heard from the colonel pursuing him like a curse.

"I would rather see my daughter dead at my feet than subjected to such a fate!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MEN IN THE PLOT.

A MONTH had elapsed, and it was the night before the great Acton steeple-chase, that all the sporting world of the United States had been eagerly looking forward to for months.

Bill Snyder had been put through the judi-

cial mill, and although the old charges in New Orleans had not been pressed, there had been enough proved against him in the State of Ohio to send him to the Penitentiary in Columbus for five years. As the reader knows, he was a member of a gang of thieves in Cleveland, and though when the case came to court, it had been found impossible to implicate any one but himself, Joe Morton still had his eye on Dora's Place with the expectation of making a haul at last. The fur robbery could not be fastened upon either Kid or Wilk. The detective saw that at once. So those two crooks still roamed at large, but out of the reach of the Cleveland police. The murder for which Joe arrested Snyder could not be proved. Witnesses had been spirited away, and every obstacle thrown in the way of conviction, and it was no surprise to the detective when the verdict "Not proven" was rendered. So, he just brought his prisoner back to Cleveland, and had the satisfaction of sending him to prison for five years, in spite of Snide's sneering declarations that there was not a jury in the country that would convict him on such evidence as Morton could produce, and that there was nothing in the charge, anyhow.

But Bill was comfortably settled in the Penitentiary, where he was wearing a striped suit that did not add to his beauty, his twisted anatomy making all the stripes awry, and giving him a general appearance of a large monkey with whom some frolicsome scene-painter had been having some fun.

The place was Plunge Thornton's training stables, the time was ten o'clock at night.

It was a dark night, there being no moon, although myriads of stars dotted the heavens, and the different well-known constellations were strongly marked, making a celestial panorama that any one with a disposition for idle enjoyment must appreciate.

The door of Flash o' Light's stable was open, and the horse with a blanket carefully put over his back to protect his loins from such of the evening damp as might possibly find its way into the stall, was standing with his head in his manger, eating his oats in a careless, comfortable way that always distinguished the great racer when he had all his creature comforts attended to, and nothing particular to disturb him.

Mose Lloyd was gently rubbing the horse's legs with a damp cloth, preparatory to drying them off. He did not like to leave Flash alone for an instant, but was always anxious to be doing something to improve his condition and make him an even handsomer piece of horse-flesh than he was.

"Dey mought as well guv it up," muttered Mose, as he stood back to look admiringly at the racer. "Dey mought as well guv it up. Dey ain't gwine ter hev no mo' chance to win ag'in' yer dan ef dey wasn't in de race; yo' heah me, now."

He continued his rubbing and his soliloquy:

"Dere's been some mighty ugly work goin' on 'roun' heah; dat's a fac'. Dat dar Plunge gwine ter make yer lose ef he kin. I've made my obsewations ob dat feller, an' he's gwine ter throw de race to Loafer ef he kin. Dats what!"

Mose rubbed a little harder and a frown that screwed up his old face, made its appearance, and indicated that Mose Lloyd had weighty matters on his mind.

"But, I bet ef I kin only git ter tell Joe Mawton, we will fix 'um. We will fix 'um!"

Mose appeared to derive great enjoyment from this remark, for he repeated it under his breath again and again, as he rubbed away at Flash o' Light's legs.

"Here, you!" broke in a harsh voice upon the boy's meditations.

"Yes, Mistah Thornton," said Mose, humbly, in a very different tone to that he had employed for his *sotto voce* reflections.

"Get out."

"Sah?"

"I said get out."

"Yes, sah. But Flash—"

"Flash is all right. I will attend to him. It's past ten o'clock. You will have to be around very early in the morning, and I want you to get some sleep, so that you will feel fresh to-morrow."

"Yes, sah; but Flash. Who's ter—"

"Never you mind. I am going to stay with Flash o' Light all night."

The boy looked troubled, but took care that the trainer should not see it.

"Golly, I wish Joe Mawton was hyar," he muttered, under his breath. "Dar's trouble hyar, as suah as my name is Mose Lloyd."

"Come, get out," interrupted Plunge, impatiently.

"Yes, sah."

"Well, why don't you go? Do you want me to help you move?"

"No, sah. I'm gwine directly."

"You had better," observed the trainer, gruffly.

"You old debbill! I wish Joe Mawton was hyar. Dat's all," grumbled Mose, as he rubbed away with a final outburst of energy, preparatory to leaving the stable.

The trainer walked to the door and looked out

into the starlit night. He was thinking—thinking!

"Dar yer are, Flash," exclaimed Mose, at last, as he gave a finishing touch to the horse's legs, and stood back to admire his work. "Dar yer are. De prettiest hoss as ever stood in a stable, or done had a saddle put on him."

He stepped up to Flash o' Light's head and threw his arm around the proudly-arched neck with all the wild enthusiasm of his race.

"You'll win to-morrow, won't yer, Flash? You'll distance 'em all, an' you'll show dese yere Ohio men what blood can do, won't yer, Flash? 'Member, Mose will be a-watchin' yer, an' he'll done go cl'ar crazy ef you git left. Now, you mind dat. D'y'e heah me?"

He hugged the beautiful neck and looked into the large bright eyes shining in the dim light of the single gas-jet, with as much affection as if the steeple-chaser had been a human being. He could not bring himself to leave the stable, try as he would.

"Dar's er plot ag'in' yer, I'm afeard, Flash," he whispered. "Dar's a plot ag'in' yer. But don't be scart. Joe Mawton is on de watch, I'm suah, somewhar, though I ain't seen him, an' things will be all right ef yo' keeps a stiff upper lip. You'll do de best yo' kin, anyhow, won't yer? But, by golly, I done wish dat Joe Mawton was heah. I s'pose he's somewhar. He's somewhar."

The boy's confidence in the detective's being somewhere in the vicinity to checkmate the efforts that Mose was sure were being made to make Flash o' Light lose the great steeple-chase on the morrow, was touching. He felt himself surrounded by the elements of a conspiracy, and the only light he could see in the general gloom was the probability that Joe Morton would not allow Flash to be left in the power of his enemies without doing something to upset their plans.

The detective had been so busy over the Snide Bill matter for the past month that he had not been able to see Mose once since he arrested Bill. He had been to New Orleans, and had now only just completed his work by seeing Snide Bill safely ensconced in the Columbus Penitentiary. Where he was now, Mose had not the slightest idea.

"What! You are not out of here yet, eh? Do you want me to have to tell you again?"

The grating voice of the trainer broke in upon the boy's discourse to the horse, and Mose started.

"I'm a-gwine, sah. I'm a-gwine."

With a last regretful look at Flash, he strolled out of the stable toward his quarters with the other colored boys, at the end of the row of sheds. The trainer watched him with a frown until he disappeared, and the loud guffaws of the inmates told that they were enjoying some joke at Mose's expense.

"It would not do to have that coon around now," muttered Plunge, as he walked into Flash o' Light's stall, and looked thoughtfully at the racer.

For ten minutes he did not speak. He walked around Flash and examined him closely from every point of view.

"So, so," he growled at last. "Perfect! Perfect! Loafer would not have the ghost of a chance, if he is in no better condition than I understand he is."

For five minutes longer he looked at Flash, although it would have been apparent to any one who had happened to look in, that he did not see the horse, but a procession of events passing like a panorama before his mental vision. In other words, the trainer was in a deep reverie.

A low whistle, that to ears was not so sharp as the trainer's, might have been mistaken for the sighing of the wind, broke the stillness.

"Aha! They are here, then," muttered Plunge, as he turned out the gas-jet against the wall, leaving the interior of the stable in pitchy darkness.

He walked outside, pulling the door shut, but fastening it only with the latch. Then he cautiously made his way to the outer gate and listened.

Soon he distinguished a slight noise of shuffling feet on the other side of the gate, and he tapped gently on the wood. The reply was another low whistle, even softer than that which had just attracted his attention.

"All right!" whispered a voice, as an addenda to the whistle.

The trainer's response was to gently and quietly unbar the gate and open it about a foot, to let the person outside pass into the inclosure.

Instead of one person, there were two who squeezed through the narrow aperture and stood silently by the side of the trainer.

He did not seem surprised, however. He shut the gate quietly, and looked cautiously around, as well as he could in the darkness, to make sure that there were no eavesdroppers in the vicinity.

All was quiet, save for the loud laughter of the colored stable-boys in their distant apartment. He walked across the space intervening between the outer gate of the inclosure and the door of Flash o' Light's stable, signing to his mysterious companions to follow him. They

obeyed with a sneaking sort of step that is not often the attribute of honest men.

With a last look into the surrounding gloom, the trainer opened the door and motioned to the strangers to pass inside, he following.

He did not close the door, because there was no light in the stable, and it would be impossible for any one to see them through the doorway. On the other hand, if any one tried to slip into the stable, he would most likely be seen by the trainer or his companions before he could accomplish his purpose.

"Wal, Cap," said one of the two men, as the three took up their position in a group near Flash's head.

"Well."

"What air weter do? Let us know, 'cause it ain't none too healthy fer us 'roun' hyar, ez yer know."

"That's the ticket, captain. It's bloomin' un'healthy, arter what them blokes 'as 'eerd about us, don't you know."

"Oh, shut up, Wilk!" put in the other man, impatiently. "Yer allers ar' makin' er monkey uv yerself somehow."

"Now, look 'ere, Kid the Skipper," responded the other, in a heat. "I don't want none of your bloomin' cheek. You can't skip about me, don't you know; leastways not till we've 'ad that thar mill for the light-weight championship, and not then if I knows myself."

Both men had spoken in a low whisper, which, on account of the energy they threw into their remarks, nearly made them burst blood-vessels in their temples, and, if there had been light enough to see them, would have shown that their faces were terrible red with repressed emotion.

How long they would have continued their argument, it is impossible to say, but the trainer brought it to a sudden conclusion by seizing each by the back of his neck and knocking their heads together smartly, as he growled:

"You infernal fools! Be quiet, or as sure as I am alive I'll turn you over to the police within half an hour."

The threat was not without its effect, for Kid the Skipper and Wilk the Tough did not speak another word, except to answer the trainer.

"Now, then, listen," he went on, after a pause. "To-morrow forenoon this race takes place. I do not care who wins, but *Flash o' Light must lose!*"

"Loafer will win," the Skipper announced.

"Perhaps. But that is nothing to me, so long as Flash does *not!*"

"What about the jockey? Can he be fixed?"

"No; Colonel Wright is going to ride Flash himself. So that is out of the question."

"Well, why not fix the horse to-night?" asked Kid, coolly.

"What, in my stable? And have people suspect me? Why, you must be a fool!"

As the trainer said this, a man who had managed to crawl through the open doorway near the ground without being seen, sat in a dark corner, not far from Flash o' Light's heels, and nodded to himself in decided appreciation of the trainer's last expressed sentiment.

CHAPTER XXIX.

JAUNTY JOE ON DECK.

"I GUESS it wouldn't do, Cap. That's er fact, I didn't think," observed Kid.

"You never do," thought Wilk, but he did not say so. He did not dare to resume his quarrel with the Skipper just now.

"Do," said Plunge, contemptuously; "of course it would not do. But—"

He stopped and looked cautiously toward the door. But the listener, who had made his way into the stable, was safely hidden behind Flash, and was out of sight of the trainer.

"Well?"

It was Wilk that spoke, and Kid would have snubbed the Tough but for the restraining presence of the trainer. He did not approve of his companion's taking too active a part in the discussion.

Plunge took no notice of Wilk's query. He was thinking—again thinking.

"Kid," he exclaimed abruptly.

"Yes, Cap."

"Listen."

"I'm er-listenin'," whispered Kid.

"So am I," growled Wilk.

"So am I," was the inaudible addition of the mysterious individual crouching near the heels of Flash o' Light.

"Now, boys," continued the trainer, "the race is fixed for ten o'clock to-morrow morning. This job, if it is done at all, must be settled before the starter's bell rings."

"You scoundrel!" breathed the unknown to himself.

"That's so, Cap," assented Kid.

"Wot a bloomin' lark!"

As Wilk made this characteristic observation he chuckled hoarsely, and immediately received a poke in the ribs from the indignant Kid that brought his mirth to a sudden termination.

"I have not quite made up my mind about the way this thing is to be done," went on the trainer, reflectively, "but I think this will be the best way."

He drew from his pocket a small bottle, and shook it at his ear in the dark.

The stranger hiding in the corner of the stall caught the gurgle of liquid in the bottle, and strained his attention to determine what was going on.

"If he tries to give anything to Flash now, I'll jump up and tackle the three of them here, as sure as my name is Joe Morton. Which it isn't, by the way," he added, with a silent laugh, "though most people in this vicinity know me by that appellation. The villain! He will prevent Flash winning the steeple-chase, will he? We will see. It will keep me on the watch to beat them, but I'll do it, or—Plunge Thornton shall never leave the race-course alive to-morrow morning."

The trainer here lighted the gas-jet, turning it up very slightly, so as to throw a dim glow upon himself and his companions but leaving the detective, who of course, was the listener, in the deep shadow.

"See this bottle, Kid?"

"Yes, Cap."

"To-morrow morning, between the time Flash o' Light leaves this stable and stands at the starting post at the Acton Steeple-chase Course, you must put this dose into him."

"Yes, Cap."

"You thoroughly understand?"

"Yes, Cap. But, why did you not take the horse to the course to-night, with the others, so that he could have stayed in the stable that ready for the morning? Wouldn't it have been easier to do their job there without anybody thinking of you?"

"No. There are too many people on the watch there at all times. I know better than that. You see, the course is only a mile or so away, and I had plenty of excuse for keeping him here, where he is at home, when it was such a short distance to take him. The gentle walk of a mile will do him good in the morning."

The trainer allowed his stern features to relax into the ghost of a smile, and Wilk chuckled in a choked sort of way that provoked bitter indignation on the part of Kid.

"Yer durned fool! Shut yer mouth!"

"Who's a fool? I'll break yer blooming jaw if—"

"Silence!" commanded the trainer, and Wilk broke off obediently at once.

"Thar ain't no other way of doin' this hyar thing is thar? I kinder hate ter spile er boss like the Flash, too, when I come ter think of it," said the Kid, reflectively.

"Of course there is not," was the trainer's impatient response. "Is there a horse entered for the steeple-chase that has the least chance with Flash o' Light provided he is in condition?"

Kid shook his head, and held out his hand for the bottle.

"I should like you to tell me somethin' more about this hyar job. When d'ye think it kin best be done?"

"I'll tell you. I shall take Flash over to Acton. I will not trust any one else to handle him. Do you see?"

Kid grinned. He *did* see.

"Well, when he is saddled, I will let you ride him up and down for a little while before Colonel Wright mounts."

"Yes."

"The people will have seen that the horse is all right. Colonel Wright will examine him, and will be delighted."

"Yes."

"The rest is easy. You manage to put this liquid down his throat in a capsule hidden in a tuft of hay. I will put it into the capsule to-night. In fact, I will do it now."

Plunge Thornton, who was a clever fellow, and could do many things besides train horses, brought forth from an inner pocket one of the gelatine articles known as capsules. They are made to contain medicines, which are sealed up in them, and they can be swallowed whole without danger of their contents being spilled or the taste of the medicine being noticed. They are of all sizes. That which the trainer used being for a horse was of course much larger than if it had been intended for a human being.

A few delicate movements of his fingers, and the bottle was empty and the capsule full. He sealed it up by simply wetting the lips of it with his tongue, and handed it to Kid. Then he put the bottle in his pocket, intending to dispose of it at the first favorable opportunity.

"A pretty scheme," thought the detective, "but I will foil it, I think."

"That all yer hev ter say, Cap?" asked Kid.

"Yes. You had better get away from here now. It would not do for you to be seen here with me. It would tell the whole story at once. The point is, there must be no suspicion attached to me. Now, let me put you outside."

"All right, Cap. But the money for Wilk and me? It is to be two thousand dollars?"

"If Flash o' Light does not win the steeple-chase at Acton," said Plunge.

"Cert'nly! Thar's no fear of Flash gittin' very far over the course of this hyar stuff you've given me works all right, Cap."

"That I have given you? How many times have I warned you not to talk about my having

done this, that or the other? What have I given you? What do you mean?"

"Nothin', Cap," returned Kid, humbly. "I made er mistake. I mean the stuff I hev in my pocket."

"That is better."

"Yes. But, say, Cap, thar's no mistake about the two thousand dollars, is thar? You'll give me the money in er lump, an' then I kin give Wilk his share, eh?"

"Not by a jug-full!" interrupted Wilk. "I don't want no sich a bloomin' cove as Kid to handle my share. You let me have my own money. I want a thousand dollars. I guess I'll have to do most of the work, as I allers have, and I want to know as my pay is all right."

Kid glanced at Wilk, in the dim light, with a vengeful expression, but he held his temper down, while the trainer said, coldly:

"I had not the slightest intention of allowing Kid the Skipper to divide two thousand dollars."

"Thar's one thing, Cap, ez you don't seem ter hev thought much about. I am not makin' myself very public jist now. Not more'n I kin help, thet is. And I don't want to bring myself very much inter notice at the track to-morrow. Supposin' the cops gits on ter me?"

"You can wear a mustache, and fix yourself up so that you will not be recognized, can't you?"

"I s'pose so, Cap; but it's risky, whichever way it is fixed, don't yer know?"

"That is what I am paying you for. But come on. We have done enough talking. I'll let you out, and mind you are on time to-morrow to attend to your business."

The trainer turned out the gas-jet again, as he spoke, and, stepping to the door, looked out into the darkness, without being able to see anything.

"I guess it is safe," he muttered to himself.

"But I do not trust the men around me. On general principles, it is better not to trust anybody. Come along here," he added, aloud.

"Let us get out."

Kid and Wilk sneaked out of the door, which the trainer did not take the trouble to secure for the few minutes that he would be away at the outer gate.

A few clouds scudding across the sky before a light breeze had partly obscured the stars, and rendered the night a few degrees darker than when the three conspirators had entered the stable.

No sooner were they out of the stable than the detective arose from his corner and ran to the partly-open doorway to watch the retreating figures of the three men. They were just distinguishable to his keen vision, making their way toward the outer gateway, noiselessly, but swiftly.

"A precious crowd," he thought. "A precious crowd!"

A hand was suddenly placed upon his shoulder, and he turned swiftly and suspiciously.

"Hol' on, Mistah Mawton. Hol' on! It's all right. It's only Mose. Golly! I'se glad ter see yer! Whar did yer come from? Golly!"

There was no doubt about Mose's being pleased, for dark as it was, the detective could see his eyes and white teeth glistening with delight. He took the honest fellow's hand and wrung it heartily.

"Mose, old boy, Mose!"

"Golly!" was all the boy could say. His heart was full.

"What are you doing here, Mose?"

"I'se er watchin' Flash. I is ez suah ez my name is Mose Lloyd. But, golly, Mistah Mawton, it done wuz hard work, an' ez fer that Plunge Thaurton," he de berry debbil. "Yes, he is!"

"I know it, Mose, I know it. But we will circumvent them yet."

"He made me go out an hour ago. He made me go out. An' don't I know whaffor? In course I do! It wuz so ez he could hatch up er scheme ag'in' the Flash. That's what it wuz."

"You're right, I guess, Mose."

"But, whar did you come from, an' how did you git hyar? Golly! I'se forgittin' ter ask yer anything about dat dar, ain't it?"

"Never mind, Mose. It is enough for you to know that I heard the scheme, and I think I can spoil it."

"W on't you tell me what it is?"

"Yes, but not now. You can help me in the morning. Flash o' Light must win. Do you hear me, Mose? He must win!"

"You rascal!"

The exclamation was from the lips of Plunge Thornton, and was accompanied by a sudden twist of the boy's shoulder that threw him to the ground against the detective's feet.

With a feeling of indignation he could not repress, Joe shot out his brawny right fist and caught the trainer in the chest with a blow that sent him staggering back until he fell over the prostrate form of the boy and measured his length on the ground.

There was murder in his eye as Plunge sprung to his feet with a bowie-knife in his hand; but Joe Morton knew his man and was ready for just such an outbreak. Ere the bowie-knife could find the mark evidently sought by the trainer—the heart of the detective, a dirk-knife, with a black handle, upon which, if there had been light enough, might have been seen the

characters 1426*—was interposed to the bowie-knife with a clash.

"You—*you!*" spluttered Plunge, his passion fairly chocking him.

"Look out, Mistah Mawton! He dangerous. Dat man will cut yer. He'll cut yer!" yelled Mose as he danced around the combatants.

"Curse you! I'm not sorry you have come!" hissed the trainer. "Now I will get you out of my way forever!"

He closed with the detective, and for two minutes the ringing of the knife-blades mingled with the heavy breathing of the two men as they fought, the one for revenge, and the other to defend himself from a murderer.

Mose did not say anything more. He kept watching as well as he could, for a chance to run in and help the detective, but the chance never came. The two men, pretty evenly matched, kept each other at bay for some time, and the sparks flying from the blades told how desperately they were fighting.

At last, Plunge's foot slipped, and, in a second he was flat upon his back, with the detective's knee on his chest.

"Now, kill me, you miserable cur! I'd as soon die as to ask you to let me up!"

"I dare say you would. But, I'm not in the business of killing vipers. No, Plunge," returned the detective, as having secured the trainer's bowie-knife he threw it far away from him into the darkness. "I shall not kill you. You can get up."

He took his knee out of the other's chest as he said this, and as Plunge sullenly arose, said, in warning tones:

"If the Skipper goes near Flash o' Light to-morrow morning, I'll arrest you on sight for conspiracy, and get a warrant for you afterward."

"You will?"

"Most certainly! And, moreover, I intend to stay in Flash o' Light's stable to-night, and see that nothing happens to prevent his winning the Acton steeple-chase."

For a few seconds, the trainer did not speak. Then he shrugged his shoulders, and walked into the stable, closely followed by Joe Morton.

Mose Lloyd's confidence in the detective had been well founded. He was on deck.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE START.

"HURRAH for Flash!" "Hurrah for Loafer!" "Five to two on Flash o' Light!" "Who's the favorite?" "Flash o' Light!" "Loafer!" "Colonel Wright!" "Captain Wood!" "Who will take five to two on Flash o' Light?"

These exclamations and a thousand like them were ringing in the clear morning air at the Acton steeple chase course just before the great race, on the day after the events detailed in the last chapter.

The scene was one of tremendous bustle, and it was easy to see that the event about to take place was one in which the thousands in attendance were deeply interested.

The loud cries with which this chapter begins issued from the throats of the spectators who were piled up in the grand stand. The course swept around into the country and ended at the starting point—an advantage that steeple-chase courses do not always possess.

A brief description of the course! It started with a straight stretch of a hundred yards or so, sloping gently downward till it reached a set of hurdles, one behind the other, making a clear jump of twenty-five feet. Then on, down the slope until a stream of at least thirty feet in width interposed. From the water the course went up hill over such obstructions as fallen trees, more hurdles, etc., and then the great leap. It consisted of a stone wall, a twenty-five foot creek and hurdles twisted up with shrubbery. Altogether, it was a pretty stiff piece of work, and would take all the mettle and strength of a very good horse to clear it without disaster. From this point the course wound around, taking a few hurdles and other trifling jumps on its way, until it ended in a good level stretch, slightly up-hill, to the starting point.

Most of the obstructions had been put in artificially to make the course, but some were natural—the two creeks for instance. The general contour of the land, of course, was as it had been made by nature.

Covering such a large space, it was easy for the spectators to spread themselves over it so that they could be sure of seeing the race as a whole, or such parts of it as particularly interested them.

The big wall and water jump attracted many, and it was curiously scanned and its danger commented upon with a gusto that is often seen among people who are not taking any risk. The general opinion, expressed in satisfied tones, was that a horse could break his rider's neck and his own back very easily if he made a slight mistake in getting over the wall and water, so that he lacked strength to cover the hurdles too.

"There's only one boss as kin do it, as I know on!" declared one big man in a heavy overcoat and with a painful snuffle in his voice, "and that's Colonel Wright's Flash o' Light."

"Guess you're right. He's a good piece of horseflesh. And by George! there he is now,

just being led out of the stable," rejoined a companion, who might have been the snuffly man's brother, from his appearance. "Let's get up there and see what they are doing."

The two speakers and some fifty others scuttled up the hill, and over and around the hurdles until they stood in the large space outside the ropes that had been drawn to keep the mob away from the horses and their attendants.

The crowd was pretty large here, and there were plenty of remarks and opinions hazarded in connection with the contestants in the forthcoming race.

The starting bell was to ring in about ten minutes, and everybody was agog.

Flash o' Light was in splendid condition. His sleek, black coat shone in the morning sunlight, and as he pawed the turf upon which he stood, one could read in his lustrous eyes a determination to win if it was in him.

He was already saddled. The operation had been performed by Mose Lloyd under the close watch of Joe Morton and Plunge Thornton. The latter would have dispensed with the presence of the detective, if he could, but Joe was not to be dispensed with.

Kid and Wilk were nowhere to be seen.

"The mean skunks! They have deceived me. Fortunately, it does not much matter now. I cannot do anything with the horse before the race now, that is certain," thought Plunge.

"Hallo, Cap. What's ther game now?" whispered a voice at his elbow.

He turned quickly and saw—an old man with a long white beard, wearing a hat slouched over his forehead, and presenting, in his bent back and trembling limbs, an appearance of extreme decrepitude. He was dressed like a stableman, with tight corduroy trousers and a sack coat, and appeared like a superannuated jockey as much as anything.

"Keep quiet," whispered the trainer savagely. "Don't you see who is here?"

The old man—Kid the Skipper in disguise—slipped back into the crowd, where he joined Wilk, who, attired as usual, was keeping himself in the background, but watching sharply that his companion did not defraud him of a due share of the money expected from Thornton.

Perhaps the Skipper flattered himself that the detective did not recognize him. If he did he was very much mistaken.

"What do you think of him, colonel?" asked Plunge, turning to a very gorgeous figure that had joined the group as Mose put the finishing touch to the horse's equipment, and examined all the buckles to make sure that they were secure.

The gorgeous figure was that of Colonel Wright attired for the race. He was to ride Flash o' Light, in accordance with the terms of the race, that owners could ride their own horses if they desired.

"Think of him?" repeated the colonel, thoughtfully. "Why, I believe he looks pretty well. Yes, yes, he looks pretty well—pretty well."

The colonel, in his bright red hunting-coat, corduroy breeches and buff top-boots, looked every inch a man, and enlisted the sympathies of the crowd as soon as he appeared. He wore a regulation jockey cap of white cloth, with a visor that shadowed his eyes thoroughly. In his right hand he carried a stout hunting-whip, and long spurs garnished his heels. He was dressed for business, and the purpose of his attire was reflected in the determined expression of his face.

He passed his hand over Flash, and looked at the buckles of the saddle-girths to see that they were all right. Then he nodded good-humoredly to Mose, and signing to Joe Morton to step aside with him, spoke to him in low tones, so that he could not be overheard by the trainer.

Plunge Thornton, apparently without knowing what he did, led Flash o' Light away in the direction of the crowd—near the grand stand, as if to give the animal a little exercise. He had not moved a dozen yards ere Kid the Skipper was at his side.

"Well, Cap?"

"Got the capsule ready?"

"Yes."

"Now is your time."

"Shall I ride him up and down for a few minutes, Cap, eh?"

"No, there is no time."

"How shall I do it?"

"I'll turn the horse around and look away for a few moments. No, that will not do either. Here. Give the capsule to me."

All this had been spoken in a hurried whisper, while the trainer led Flash o' Light up and down.

"Give yer ther capsule?"

"Yes. Quick!"

A cunning leer lighted up Kid's face and twisted his gray beard awry.

"How about ther money? Do we git it anyhow? I'm ready ter do ther work, ez yer told me."

"Yes, yes. Of course. Let Flash o' Light lose this race, and you shall have your money if you do not do anything," answered the trainer, impatiently.

The Skipper knew that, whatever other faults might be laid to the charge of Plunge, he was

not the man to break his word. So he brought out the capsule and furtively handed it to his employer.

As he did so he happened to turn his eyes in the direction of the grand stand, and met the steady gaze of a beautiful young girl who had been closely watching the proceedings of himself and the trainer.

The girl was Ada Wright, who, amid a crowd of companions of both sexes, all decked out in summer garments, with flowers innumerable among them, were waiting to see Flash o' Light in the great Acton steeple-chase.

Kid sneaked away, and Thornton, unaware of the young girl's gaze, fondled the head of Flash o' Light, with the intention of slyly introducing the capsule into his mouth at the first favorable opportunity. The colonel had seen the horse, and pronounced him in splendid condition. If he should break down now, it would be no fault of the trainer's, argued Plunge to himself.

He got the horse's nose in a firm grip with his right hand, while with his left he raised the capsule to put it into the racer's mouth.

He chuckled to himself over the success of his plan, when, suddenly, a powerful set of fingers closed upon the hand that held the poisoned capsule, and wrenched it away.

"Not yet, Mr. Thornton, not yet." It was Jaunty Joe who spoke, as he smiled at the villainous trainer, and then raised his hat gracefully to Ada Wright, who was looking down upon the scene with a hurried eagerness that was as flattering to the young detective as it was maddening to the trainer.

"Curse you!" hissed the foiled trainer. "Now what are you going to do—give me away?"

"Not yet, Thornton," announced the detective, with a careless smile. "Whether I ever do so will depend upon your future actions."

"My actions are my own," replied the other, with a scowl of venomous hate, as he led the horse toward the starting-post, where the seven other horses in the race were already pawing, backing, curveting, circling and trying their best to escape the control of their riders.

Colonel Wright, who did not care to mount till the last moment, walked forward to meet the horse.

"Here you are, colonel! Get up! You haven't much time."

"All right. Everything safe with the saddle? All the buckles secure?"

"Yes."

"Well. Now then. I'm—"

Suddenly he threw up his hands, and would have fallen had not the detective caught him.

"What's the matter, colonel?" he asked, with an expression of alarm in his face that no danger to himself could have inspired. "What is the matter?"

"I do not know. I—I—feel faint and sick, somehow. Heavens! I must ride. I must ride—"

His voice failed him and his head drooped upon the young man's shoulder. The detective could see Ada making her way out of the grand stand, with direct alarm written upon her countenance. He could see a devilish sneer upon the face of Thornton, and he could hear the yells of the crowd to get Flash o' Light into place for the start.

"What has caused it, colonel?" he asked, anxiously.

"Have you eaten anything? Have you drank anything? Is there any reason for this?"

"Ah! yes. I remember now," muttered the colonel, huskily. "It was—was—a glass—of—water."

"When? Where did you get it?"

"Ten minutes ago. I asked Mose for a glass of water, and—an—old woman, who seemed to be employed about the—stables—in some capacity, gave me a glass before—Mose—Mose could get it. I—I—drank the water."

"Ha! I see it now. They could not get at Flash o' Light, so they drugged you," groaned the detective.

"But—who—who was the woman?" asked Colonel Wright, faintly.

The answer to the question came unexpectedly. An old hag ran hastily across the space that divided the stables from the rope that held back the crowd, and disappeared among the spectators.

"Dora!" ejaculated the detective, as a light broke upon him. "I'll attend to you, my dear old lady, after the race."

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed a voice that sent a thrill through him—the voice of Ada Wright. "What is the matter?"

"Nothing particular, my child, only I cannot ride, and Flash o' Light will not win the race."

Gently she led him away. He was a little better now, and the detective turned him over to the girl with the full assurance that he would be well cared for. She took him up into the refreshment room on the grand stand, from which a view of the course could be obtained, where medical attendance was soon procured.

"There's nothing much the matter with him. He will be better in the course of an hour or two. Just let him sit quietly here. He has been dosed with an insidious drug that has the effect of making a subject sick for a time, but does no permanent injury," said the doctor.

"What is the name of the drug?" asked one of the bystanders, with pardonable curiosity.

"It would be unprofessional to reveal the name of the poisonous drug," answered the doctor, and the bystander was quenched effectually.

Down below the grand stand there was great confusion. Cries of "Flash o' Light!" rent the air, and there were demands that the favorite should get to the starting-post with the others. The crowd did not know anything about Colonel Wright's sudden sickness, for no fuss had been made about it, and Thornton was still holding the bridle of the beautiful black horse.

"Now, gentlemen! We are all ready except Colonel Wright," cried the starter from the judge's box. "Bring up Flash o' Light. We cannot wait much longer!"

The seven other horses, including the roan, Loafer, with Captain Wood, in a bright blue suit, upon his back, were drawn up in an irregular line, at the starting-post, some fifty yards away from the judge's box, where a wire stretched across the track. If the horses could reach the wire in a fairly straight line they would be started. If not, they must try again.

"Golly. Mistah Mawton! What's we gwine ter do, now, with Mistah Wright sick and no one to ride ther Flash?"

"Shut up, you black fool!" growled Plunge.

"Whar's Mistah Mawton? I done thought he was hyar," said Mose, who seemed to have lost his usual awe of the trainer in the excitement of the moment.

"Can't wait any longer for Flash o' Light. The race will proceed without him," proclaimed the judge from his box.

"No, it will not do. Where's Flash?" yelled the crowd.

The favorite was demanded by the spectators, and they did not intend to be deprived of the pleasure of seeing him if they could help it.

"The horse can hardly enter. There is no rider for him," said Thornton, with mock grief.

"Ready?" cried the judge to the riders of the seven horses pawing and kicking in their impatience to start.

"Hold!" rung out a clear voice, as Jaunty Joe Morton, wearing Colonel Wright's red coat and white cap, dashed down from the grand stand, and, at a bound, was in the saddle of the black horse. "I will ride Flash o' Light!"

Cheers rent the air, drowning the muttered curses of the trainer, as the detective, with perfect management of his steed, turned him around, and cantered up to the line of horses for the start.

He looked along the line, and saw that Captain Wood, on Loafer, was at the other end, so that six horses divided them. The six horses were all pretty good-looking animals, but Joe's experienced eye assured him that they would have no chance with Loafer or Flash o' Light, provided there were no accidents. In a steeple-chase, however, there is always a strong chance of accidents, and it is on this account that inferior horses so often win.

The detective had but little time to look at anything before the warning bell sent them all dashing helter-skelter toward the judge's box. They reached the wire in good shape, and the starter, who had been holding a flag in his hand, dropped it at the critical moment, and the start for the great Acton steeple-chase had been made.

"Rah for Flash o' Light! They're away!" yelled one enthusiastic fellow, and then the strained attention of thousands of watchers was concentrated upon the bunch of horses as they swept down the slope.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WON BY A NECK!

STEADILY they went toward the first jump, each rider holding his horse well in hand.

For the first few minutes the crowd were speechless. The interest was too strong to admit of boisterous demonstrations. After the yell of the one man as the horses got away, there was no disposition to say anything more.

Colonel Wright, from his position in the refreshment-room, could see the detective on Flash o' Light rushing down the slope, and Ada noted with delight that her father seemed to derive more strength from the sight than from any of the restoratives that had been given him.

Plunge Thornton had disappeared from the neighborhood of the starting-post, where Joe Morton had last seen him, and now could be discerned making his way by a straight cut across the country toward the water-jump, with its wall and shrubbery-twisted hurdles on either side.

"What is the game now?" thought the detective, as he cleared the first hurdle-jump without disturbing Flash o' Light's stride.

He glanced to the left as he was lifted easily over the hurdles, and saw that the other horses were all taking the jump except one—a tall, weedy animal, ridden by a heavy-weight, who did not seem to understand the management of his horse very well. The weedy horse looked at the hurdles as he approached them, and then declined the jump, so suddenly that the heavy-weight barely escaped going over by himself.

Down the slope they went until they reached the 30-foot creek.

"This will try some of them," muttered Jaunty Joe. "It is a nice clean jump, but thirty feet is something of a stretch, too. Flash is all right, however, anyhow. And Loafer don't seem to be troubled about anything either," he added, as he saw that Captain Wood, with his cap jammed down over his eyes, was pegging along in a dogged sort of way, as if determined to win or die.

"Houp-la!" cried Captain Wood, in the enthusiasm of the moment. "Now, Loafer!"

Loafer knew and loved the voice of his owner, and as he heard the encouraging sound he bounded forward. He was the first to go over the creek, and though his hind feet splashed in the sloppy mud on the other side, he did the jump pretty well.

"Well done, captain!" cried Joe, in involuntary admiration of the feat.

He was some yards behind the rest of the horses, but he wanted a clear run for Flash o' Light to the creek, and was content to let the others get over before him.

There were only five now besides Loafer and Flash o' Light, and three of the five did not want to go any further. One refused to try the jump, another landed short, and dropped with his rider into about six feet of water, from which he struggled to shore in a very disgruntled condition, and the third, going down on his knees, after clearing the stream, got up with a wobble that told the detective he was out of the race.

The other two, reaching across the thirty feet, crept close behind Loafer, and toiled up the slope toward the big wall-and-water jump that was to test the mettle of all that remained in the race.

"Keep quiet, Flash, old boy! There is no occasion for you getting excited," whispered the Jockey Detective to his horse, with as much confidence in the intelligence of the animal as if he had been a human being.

The jaunty rider did not want to wear out the Flash at the beginning of the race, and was carefully saving the powers of his horse until there would be an imperative call for all he had.

So he did not stir up the racer to do more than was required to enable him to clear the stream, which he did without trouble.

There were only the four horses left in the run now, and they were strung out according to the strength of the horses and the opinions of their riders as to the best way of keeping to the front at the finish.

Loafer was second, the lead being taken by a powerful black, very much like Flash o' Light, and, at a cursory glance, quite as good a horse. He was ridden by a veteran—an Irishman, who had traversed his native downs and bogs on the animal he now bestrode, and who did not fear anything in the way of a wall or stream. While Joe did not believe the Irishman had the slightest chance to win, he acknowledged that horse and man were a handsome pair, and that if the course had not been so long, they might have been in the first two when the judge's box was reached again.

So far, it was anybody's race. Flash o' Light was in the extreme rear now, but Joe could have put him at the front with one touch of the whip had he cared to. He did not care to, however, because he was saving his horse until all his stamina would be required.

He glanced over his shoulder at the grand stand, now a good distance before him, and his heart gave a leap as he recognized the form of Ada waving her white handkerchief, while her father, in his shirt-sleeves (for Joe wore the red coat of Colonel Wright, as well as his white jockey-cap), was looking fixedly at the four horses, without a movement.

"All right, colonel; I'll win yet, and then—Ada!" muttered Joe, as he settled himself in his saddle for the big wall-and-water jump.

A crowd of people was standing as near to the jump as the flags that marked the course would allow them; the flags, moreover, being reinforced by guards, who, pretending to watch the people, never took their eyes from the four horses speeding straight for the obstruction that would test their mettle.

Nearer and nearer came the horses, Loafer still in front, with the Irishman at his heels, then the other horse, a gray, wiry but small. Flash o' Light was last, but was by a great deal the freshest of the four animals. The generalship of Joe Morton in saving his horse was now shown. Even Loafer showed some signs of distress, the black was panting painfully, while as for the little gray, Thornton was not at all surprised when he dropped into a canter, then into a walk, and finally turned aside out of the course, completely played out.

The jump over the wall and water was a terrific one, and each of the three riders now left set his teeth, and prepared for a task that admitted of no carelessness.

"Now, Loafer! A good one, old fellow, a good one!" shouted Captain Wood, as with hand well down, he put his knees lightly to the sides of his gallant roan, and raised him at the jump.

The Irishman, on his black, involuntarily

reined in to see how Loafer would do it, and Joe Morton even held his Flash quiet for one brief period.

Putting forth all his strength, Loafer got a splendid start, and cleared the whole pile of obstructions like a bird.

"Well done, captain; well done!" cried the jaunty detective, in involuntary admiration. "Splendid!"

Then he dashed at the wall himself.

He reached the firm earth piled up near the wall, and was just giving to the bridle the tug that would be a signal for Flash, when an old woman ran toward him from the right, waving a red shawl, and motioning to him to go back.

It was too late then, even had he wished to delay to stop himself, and he dashed onward.

Flash's heels were just outside the wall, and he was on the rise when a figure sprang out of a ditch between the wall and the creek, and, with an oath, clutched at Flash o' Light's bridle!

His aim was true, and he caught the leather rein in his hand, and pulled with a vicious jerk.

The result was what he evidently expected. The horse's head pulled down, he lost his balance and dropped like a log into the water.

Jaunty Joe stuck to his saddle, and with a little trouble, managed to get Flash's heels extricated from the wall, so that he could swim the creek.

He was soon out on the other side, and then forcing the horse to an effort that seemed almost hopeless, actually made him clear the hurdles with their thickset shrubbery on the other side.

He was so excited over the situation in which he found himself that he had hardly noticed a cry of mortal agony that had arisen from the ditch as the man that had grabbed at his reins, and whom he had recognized instantly, had fallen back by the side of the wall.

Loafer was a little ahead of the Flash, but Joe Morton saw, with a thrill of hope, that he was limping in a way that told how hard it was for him to keep in the race.

As for the Irishman and his black, they had managed to scramble across somehow, but both were thoroughly done up.

The race had now resolved into a contest between Flash o' Light and Loafer.

"Hurry up, Flash! Good boy!" whispered the Jockey Detective to his steed.

Flash o' Light made an effort, and then Joe Morton noticed that he halted in his gait, and he knew that the "Thunderbolt," as the crowd called Flash o' Light, was as lame as Loafer!

How Flash o' Light got over the intervening space his rider never knew. He and Loafer were now side by side. They had cleared the last hurdle and had nothing but the stiff up-hill home-stretch. It was a fearful task, after all that had been covered.

"'Rah for Flash! Come along, Flash! 'Rah for Loafer!"

Both the horses were breathing heavily, while their respective riders, with teeth set and bridles held tightly, were determined to win if their horses could live through it.

The lameness had taken a different form with both. They no longer limped, but their knees seemed weak, and they might have pitched forward at any moment.

The two were nose and nose!

Joe looked to the right and saw Ada and her father (Colonel Wright seemed to be all right now) standing up and watching every movement of the contestants.

"'Rah for Flash! Flash has it! No, Loafer—Loafer wins!"

The two sets of people, each championing his favorite, yelled themselves hoarse, and still the two giants thundered along, so exactly even that no one could say which had the advantage.

Three more strides would determine.

One! Two!

Ah! What is that?

"Loafer is done!"

These three words were uttered in anguish by Captain Wood, just as Jaunty Joe Morton, on Flash o' Light, swept under the wire—a winner by a neck!

Loafer staggered, and just as Captain Wood leaped from her back, he fell to the ground, with what in veterinary parlance is known as a "broken heart." In other words, Loafer had been overstrained, and had been raced to death!

Shall we tell how Colonel Wright fell upon the young Jockey Detective's neck in joy over the winning of his favorite Flash o' Light, and how Ada, timidly thanking Joe on her father's account, was brought forward by the impetuous colonel and given to him on the spot as his plighted bride?

Shall we tell how they were married, three months later, and, how both Captain Wood and Dr. Hezekiah Fulton were at the wedding, and how the doctor, with the colonel's full sanction, gave the secret of the emerald to the young bride—a secret that added to their wealth to such an extent as to make the handsome settlement of the colonel almost superfluous?

Shall we tell how Plunge Thornton—who had

started up in the ditch to make Flash o' Light lose the race, at any hazard, was struck by the iron-shod heel of the horse and injured so badly that he died the same night?

Shall we tell how Dora turned out to be Plunge Thornton's mother, and how she mended her rather doubtful ways, and retired to the country to spend the rest of her days in quietude after her son's death, upon the money that he left her when his debts were all paid?

Shall we tell how Kid and Wilk both left Cleveland, and how they were subsequently heard of in Arizona as the principal actors in a lynching party, in which they obliged the rest of the company by being hung to trees for horse-stealing?

While we have been asking whether we shall tell all these things we have told them, and so we will let them go.

Colonel Wright is now many times a millionaire, as the result of the big strike in the Gargoyle Silver Mines, in the business of which he is much assisted by his son-in-law, the late Jockey Detective, but who has dropped the detective business as a profession now, although always interested in the working out of a clew to a crime. He goes by his real name of Ronald Montgomery now, and but few people in Cleveland know that he is the famous Jaunty Joe, the Jockey Detective, who won the Acton Steeplechase with Flash o' Light, the Thunderbolt.

THE END.

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239 The Terrible Trio; or, The Angel of the Army.
244 Merciless Mart, the Man Tiger of Missouri.
250 The Rough Riders; or, Sharp Eye, the Scourge.
256 Double Dan, the Dastard; or, The Pirates.
264 The Crooked Three.
269 The Bayou Bravo; or, The Terrible Trail.
273 Mountain Mose, the Gorge Outlaw.
282 The Merciless Marauders; or, Carl's Revenge.
287 Dandy Dave and his Horse, White Stocking.
293 Stampede Steve; or, The Doom of the Double Face.
301 Bowlder Bill; or, The Man from Taos.
309 Raybold, the Rattling Ranger.
322 The Crimson Coyotes; or, Nita, the Nemesis.
328 King Kent; or, The Bandits of the Basin.
342 Blanco Bill, the Mustang Monarch.
358 The Prince of Pan Out.
371 Gold Buttons; or, The Up Range Pards.
511 Paint Pete, the Prairie Patrol.

BY DR. J. H. ROBINSON.

- 13 Pathaway; or, Nick Whiffles, the old Nor'west Trapper.
17 Nightshade; or, The Robber Prince.
22 Whitelaw; or, Nattie of the Lake Shore.
37 Hiri, the Hunchback; or, The Santee Sword-maker.
53 Silver Knife; or, The Rocky Mountain Ranger.
70 Hydrabad, the Strangler.
73 The Knights of the Red Cross; or, The Granada Magician.
163 Ben Brion; or, Redpath, the Avenger.

BY MAJOR DANGERFIELD BURR.

- 92 Buffalo Bill, the Buckskin King.
117 Dashing Dandy; or, The Hotspur of the Hills.
142 Captain Crimson, the Man of the Iron Face.
156 Velvet Face, the Border Bravo.
175 Wild Bill's Trump Card; or, The Indian Heiress.
188 The Phantom Mazeppa; or, The Hyena.
448 Hark Kenton, the Traitor.

BY LIEUT. A. K. SIMS.

- 528 Huckleberry, the Foot-Hills Detective.
552 Prince Primrose, the Flower of the Flock.

BY MAJOR DANIEL BOONE DUMONT.

- 383 Silver Sam, the Detective.
389 Colonel Double-Edge, the Cattle Baron's Pard.
411 The White Crook; or, Old Hark's Fortress.
420 The Old River Sport; or, A Man of Honor.
439 Salamander Sam.
454 The Night Raider.
464 Sandycraw, the Man of Grit.
508 Topnotch Tom, the Mad Parson.

BY COLONEL DELLE SARA.

- 53 Silver Sam; or, The Mystery of Deadwood City.
87 The Scarlet Captain; or, Prisoner of the Tower.
106 Shamus O'Brien, the Bould Boy of Glingal.

BY GEORGE ST. GEORGE.

- 296 Duncan, the Sea Diver.
417 Tucson Tom; or, The Fire Trailers.

BY GUSTAVE AIMARD.

- 15 The Tiger Slayer; or, Eagle Heart to the Rescue.
19 Red Cedar, the Prairie Outlaw.
20 The Bandit at Bay; or, The Prairie Pirates.
21 The Trapper's Daughter; or, The Outlaw's Fate.
24 Prairie Flower.
62 Loyal Heart; or, The Trappers of Arkansas.
149 The Border Rifles. A Tale of the Texan War.
151 The Freebooters. A Story of the Texan War.
153 The White Scalper.

BY NEWTON M. CURTISS.

- 120 The Texan Spy; or, The Prairie Guide.
254 Giant Jake, the Patrol of the Mountain.

BY FRANCIS JOHNSON.

- 25 The Gold Guide; or, Steel Arm, Regulator.
26 The Death Track; or, The Mountain Outlaws.
123 Alapaha the Squaw; or, The Border Renegades.
124 Assowaum the Avenger; or, The Doom of the Destroyer.
135 The Bush Ranger; or, The Half-Breed Rajah.
136 The Outlaw Hunter; or, The Bush Ranger.
138 The Border Bandit; or, The Horse Thief's Trail.

BY C. DUNNING CLARK.

- 164 The King's Fool.
183 Gilbert the Guide.

BY COL. THOMAS H. MONSTERY.

- 82 Iron Wrist, the Swordmaster.
126 The Demon Duelist; or, The League of Steel.
143 The Czar's Spy; or, The Nihilist League.
150 El Rubio Bravo, King of the Swordsmen.
157 Mourad, the Mameluke; or, The Three Swordmasters.
169 Corporal Cannon, the Man of Forty Duels.
236 Champion Sam; or, The Monarchs of the Show.
262 Fighting Tom, the Terror of the Toughs.
322 Spring-Heel Jack; or, The Masked Mystery.

BY ISAAC HAWKS, Ex-Detective.

- 232 Orson Oxx; or, The River Mystery.
240 A Cool Head; or, Orson Oxx in Peril.

BY NED BUNTLINE.

- 14 Thayendanegea, the Scourge; or, The War-Eagle.
16 The White Wizard; or, The Seminole Prophet.
18 The Sea Bandit; or, The Queen of the Isle.
23 The Red Warrior; or, The Comanche Lover.
61 Captain Seawolf, the Privateer.
111 The Smuggler Captain; or, The Skipper's Crime.
122 Saul Sabberday, the Idiot Spy.
270 Andros, the Rover; or, The Pirate's Daughter.
361 Tombstone Dick, the Train Pilot.
517 Buffalo Bill's First Trail.

BY E. A. ST. MOX.

- 471 The Heart of Oak Detective.
491 Zigzag and Cutt, the Invincible Detectives.

BY EDWARD WILLETT.

- 129 Mississippi Mose; or, a Strong Man's Sacrifice.
209 Buck Farley, the Bonanza Prince.
222 Bill the Blizzard; or, Red Jack's Crime.
248 Montana Nat, the Lion of Last Chance Camp.
274 Flush Fred, the Mississippi Sport.
289 Flush Fred's Full Hand.
298 Logger Lem; or, Life in the Pine Woods.
308 Hemlock Hank, Tough and True.
315 Flush Fred's Double; or, The Squatters' League.
327 Terrapin Dick, the Wildwood Detective.
337 Old Gabe, the Mountain Tramp.
348 Dan Dillon, King of Crosscut.
368 The Canyon King; or, a Price on his Head.
483 Flush Fred, the River Sharp.

BY PERCY B. ST. JOHN.

- 57 The Silent Hunter.
86 The Big Hunter; or, The Queen of the Woods.

MISCELLANEOUS.

- 6 Wildcat Bob. By Edward L. Wheeler.
9 Handy Andy. By Samuel Lover.
10 Vidocq, the French Police Spy. By himself.
11 Midshipman Easy. By Captain Marryatt.
32 B'hoys of Yale; or, The Scrapes of Collegians. By John D. Vose.
60 Wide Awake, the Robber King. By F. Dumont.
68 The Fighting Trapper. By Capt. J. F. C. Adams.
76 The Queen's Musketeers. By George Albany.
78 The Mysterious Spy. By Arthur M. Grainger.
102 The Masked Band. By George L. Aiken.
110 The Silent Rifleman. By H. W. Herbert.
125 The Blacksmith Outlaw. By H. Ainsworth.
133 Rody the Rover. By William Carleton.
140 The Three Spaniards. By Geo. Walker.
144 The Hunchback of Notre Dame. By Victor Hugo.
146 The Doctor Detective. By George Lemuel.
152 Captain Ironnerv, the Counterfeiter Chief.
158 The Doomed Dozen. By Dr. Frank Powell.
166 Owlet, the Robber Prince. By S. R. Urban.
179 Conrad, the Convict. By Prof. Gildersleeve.
190 The Three Guardsmen. By Alexander Dumas.
261 Black Sam, the Prairie Thunderbolt. By Col. Jo Yards.
275 The Smuggler Cutter. By J. D. Conroy.
312 Kinkfoot Karl, the Mountain Scourge. By Morris Redwing.
330 Cop Colt, the Quaker City Detective. By C. Morris.
350 Flash Falcon, the Society Detective. By Weldon J. Cobb.
353 Bart Brennan; or, The King of Straight Flush. By John Cuthbert.
366 The Telegraph Detective. By George Henry Morse.
410 Sarah Brown, Detective. By K. F. Hill.
500 The True-Heart Pards. By Dr. Noel Dunbar.
518 Royal Richard, the Thoroughbred. By J. W. Osbon.
534 Green Mountain Joe; or, The Counterfeiter's Cave. By Marmaduke Dey.
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- 2 The Dare Devil; or, The Winged Sea Witch.
85 The Cretan Rover; or, Zuleikah the Beautiful.
89 The Pirate Prince; or, The Queen of the Isle.
94 Freelance, the Buccaneer.
103 Merle, the Mutineer; or, The Red Anchor Brand.
104 Montezuma, the Merciless.
109 Captain Kyd, the King of the Black Flag.
116 Black Plume; or, The Sorceress of Hell Gate.
121 The Sea Cadet; or, The Rover of the Rigoletts.
128 The Chevalier Corsair; or, The Heritage.
131 Buckskin Sam, the Texas Trail.
134 Darkey Dan, the Colored Detective.
139 Fire Eye; or, The Bride of a Buccaneer.
147 Gold Spur, the Gentleman from Texas.
155 The Corsair Queen; or, The Gypsies of the Sea.
162 The Mad Mariner; or, Dishonored and Disowned.
168 Wild Bill, the Pistol Dead Shot.
172 Black Pirate; or, The Golden Fetters Mystery.
177 Don Diablo, the Planter-Corsair.
181 The Scarlet Schooner; or, The Sea Nemesis.
184 The Ocean Vampire; or, The Castle Heiress.
189 Wild Bill's Gold Trail; or, The Desperate Dozen.
198 The Skeleton Schooner; or, The Skimmer.
205 The Gambler Pirate; or, Lady of the Lagoon.
210 Buccaneer Bess, the Lioness of the Sea.
216 The Corsair Planter; or, Driven to Doom.
220 The Specter Yacht; or, A Brother's Crime.
224 Black Beard, the Buccaneer.
231 The Kid Glove Miner; or, The Magic Doctor.
235 Red Lightning the Man of Chance.
246 Queen Helen, the Amazon of the Overland.
255 The Pirate Priest; or, The Gambler's Daughter.
259 Cutlass and Cross; or, The Ghouls of the Sea.
281 The Sea Owl; or, The Lady Captain of the Gulf.
307 The Phantom Pirate; or, The Water Wolves.
318 The Indian Buccaneer; or, The Red Rovers.
325 The Gentleman Pirate; or, The Casco Hermits.
329 The League of Three; or, Buffalo Bill's Pledge.
336 The Magic Ship; or, Sandy Hook Freebooters.
341 The Sea Desperado.
346 Ocean Guerrillas; or, Phantom Midshipman.
362 Buffalo Bill's Grip; or, Oath Bound to Custer.
364 The Sea Fugitive; or, The Queen of the Coast.
369 The Coast Corsair; or, The Siren of the Sea.
373 Sailor of Fortune; or, The Barnegat Buccaneer.
377 Afloat and Ashore; or, The Corsair Conspirator.
388 The Giant Buccaneer; or, The Wrecker Witch.
393 The Convict Captain.
399 The New Monte Cristo.
418 The Sea Siren; or, The Fugitive Privateer.
425 The Sea Sword; or, The Ocean Rivals.
430 The Fatal Frigate; or, Rivals in Love and War.
435 The One-Armed Buccaneer.
446 Ocean Ogre, the Outcast Corsair.
457 The Sea Insurgent.
469 The Lieutenant Detective.
476 Bob Brent, the Buccaneer.
482 Ocean Tramps.
489 The Pirate Hunter.
493 The Scouts of the Sea.
510 El Moro, the Corsair Commodore.
516 Chatard, the Dead-Shot Duelist.
524 The Sea Chaser; or, The Pirate Noble.
530 The Savages of the Sea.
540 The Fleet Scourge; or, The Sea Wings of Salem.
546 The Doomed Whaler; or, The Life Wreck.
553 Mark Monte, the Mutineer; or, The Branded Brig.
560 The Man from Mexico.

BY WILLIAM H. MANNING.

- 279 The Gold Dragoon, or, The California Blood-bound.
297 Colorado Rube, the Strong Arm of Hotspur.
335 Will Dick Turpin, the Leadville Lion.
405 Old Baldy, the Brigadier of Buck Basin.
415 Hot Heart, the Detective Spy.
427 The Rivals of Montana Mill.
437 Deep Duke; or, The Man of Two Lives.
442 Wild West Walt, the Mountain Veteran.
449 Bluff Burke, King of the Rockies.
455 Yank Yellowbird, the Tall Hustler of the Hills.
463 Gold Gauntlet, the Gulch Gladiator.
470 The Duke of Dakota.
479 Gladiator Gabe, the Samson of Sassajack.
486 Kansas Kitten, the Northwest Detective.
492 Border Bullet, the Prairie Sharpshooter.
498 Central Pacific Paul, the Mail Train Spy.
506 Uncle Honest, the Peacemaker of Hornets' Nest.
513 Texas Tartar, the Man With Nine Lives.
521 Paradise Sam, the Nor'-West Pilot.
531 Saddle-Chief Kit, the Prairie Centaur.
539 Old Doubledark, the Willy Detective.
551 Garry Kean, the Man with Backbone.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES.

- 278 Hercules Goldspur, the Man of the Velvet Hand.
294 Broadcloth Burt, the Denver Dandy.
321 California Claude, the Lone Bandit.
335 Flash Dan, the Nabob; or, Blades of Bowie Bar.
340 Cool Conrad, the Dakota Detective.
347 Denver Duke, the Man with "Sand."
352 The Desperate Dozen.
365 Keen Kennard, the Shasta Shadow.
374 Major Blister, the Sport of Two Cities.
382 The Bonanza Band; or, Dread Don of Cool Clan.
392 The Lost Bonanza; or, The Boot of Silent Hound.
400 Captain Coldgrip; or, The New York Spotter.
407 Captain Coldgrip's Nerve; or, Injun Nick.
413 Captain Coldgrip in New York.
421 Father Ferret, the Frisco Shadow.
434 Lucifer Lynx, the Wonder Detective.
441 The California Sharp.
447 Volcano, the Frisco Spy.
453 Captain Coldgrip's Long Trail.
460 Captain Coldgrip, the Detective.
468 Coldgrip in Deadwood.
480 Hawkspear, the Man with a Secret.
487 Sunshine Sam, a Chip of the Old Block.
496 Richard Redfire, the Two Worlds' Detective.
505 Phil Fox, the Gentle Spotter.
512 Captain Velvet's Big Stake.
523 Reynard of Red Jack; or, The Lost Detective.
532 Jack Javert, the Independent Detective.
543 The Magnate Detective.
550 Silk Hand, the Mohave Ferret.
559 Danton, the Shadow Sharp.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

- 27 The Spotter Detective; or, Girls of New York.
31 The New York Sharp; or, The Flash of Lightning.
33 Overland Kit; or, The Idyl of White Pine.
34 Rocky Mountain Rob, the California Outlaw.
35 Kentuck, the Sport; or, Dick Talbot of the Mines.
36 Injun Dick; or, The Death-Shot of Shasta.
38 Velvet Hand; or, Injun Dick's Iron Grip.
41 Gold Dan; or, The White Savage of Salt Lake.
42 The California Detective; or, The Witches of N. Y.
49 The Wolf Demon; or, The Kanawha Queen.
56 The Indian Mazeppa; or, Madman of the Plains.
59 The Man from Texas; or, The Arkansas Outlaw.
63 The Winged Whale; or, The Red Rupert of Gulf.
72 The Phantom Hand; or, The 5th Avenue Heiress.
75 Gentleman George; or, Parlor Prison and Street.
77 The Fresh of Frisco; or, The Heiress.
79 Joe Phenix, the Police Spy.
81 The Human Tiger; or, A Heart of Fire.
84 Hunted Down; or, The League of Three.
91 The Winning Oar; or, The Innkeeper's Daughter.
93 Captain Dick Talbot, King of the Road.
97 Bronze Jack, the California Thoroughbred.
101 The Man from New York.
107 Richard Talbot, of Cinnabar.
112 Joe Phenix, Private Detective.
130 Captain Volcano, or, The Man of Red Revolvers.
161 The Wolves of New York; or, Joe Phenix's Hunt.
173 California John, the Pacific Thoroughbred.
196 La Marmoset, the Detective Queen.
203 The Double Detective; or, The Midnight Mystery.
252 The Wall Street Blood; or, The Telegraph Girl.
320 The Gentle Spotter; or, The N. Y. Night Hawk.
349 Iron-Hearted Dick, the Gentleman Road-Agent.
354 Red Richard; or, The Crimson Cross Brand.
363 Crowningshield, the Detective.
370 The Dusky Detective; or, Pursued to the End.
376 Black Beards; or, The Rio Grande High Horse.
381 The Gypsy Gentleman; or, Nick Fox, Detective.
384 Injun Dick, Detective; or, Tracked to New York.
391 Kate Scott, the Decoy Detective.
408 Doc Grip, the Vendetta of Death.
419 The Bat of the Battery; or, Joe Phenix, Detective.
423 The Lone Hand; or, The Red River Recreants.
440 The High Horse of the Pacific.
461 The Fresh on the Rio Grande.
465 The Actor Detective.
475 Chin Chin, the Chinese Detective.
490 The Lone Hand in Texas.
497 The Fresh in Texas.
520 The Lone Hand on the Caddo.
529 The Fresh in New York.
537 Blake, the Mountain Lion.
556 Fresh, the Sport-Chevalier.

BY JOSEPH E. BADGER, JR.

- 28 Three-Fingered Jack, the Road-Agent.
30 Gospel George; or, Fiery Fred, the Outlaw.
40 Long-Haired Pards; or, The Tartars of the Plains.
45 Old Bull's-Eye, the Lightning Shot.
47 Pacific Pete, the Prince of the Revolver.
50 Jack Rabbit, the Prairie Sport.
64 Double-Sight, the Death Shot.
67 The Boy Jockey; or, Honesty vs. Crookedness.
71 Captain Cool Blade; or, Mississippi Man Shark.
88 Big George; or, The Five Outlaw Brothers.
105 Dan Brown of Denver; or, The Detective.
119 Alabama Joe; or, The Yazoo Man-Hunters.
127 Sol Scott, the Masked Miner.
141 Equinox Tom, the Bully of Red Rock.
154 Joaquin, the Saddle King.
165 Joaquin, the Terrible.
170 Sweet William, the Trapper Detective.
180 Old '49; or, The Amazon of Arizona.
197 Revolver Rob; or, The Belle of Nugget Camp.
201 Pirate of the Placers; or, Joaquin's Death Hunt.
233 The Old Boy of Tombstone.
241 Spitfire Saul, King of the Rustlers.
249 Elephant Tom, of Durango.
257 Death Trap Diggings; or, A Hard Man from 'Way Back.
283 Sleek Sam, the Devil of the Mines.
286 Pistol Johnny; or, One Man in a Thousand.
292 Moke Hornor, the Boss Roustabout.
302 Faro Saul, the Handsome Hercules.
317 Frank Lightfoot, the Miner Detective.
324 Old Forked Lightning, the Solitary.
331 Chispa Charley, the Gold Nugget Sport.
339 Spread Eagle Sam, the Hercules Hide Hunter.
345 Masked Mark, the Mounted Detective.
351 Nor' West Nick, the Border Detective.
355 Stormy Steve, the Mad Athlete.
360 Jumping Jerry, the Gamecock from Sundown.
367 A Royal Flush; or, Dan Brown's Big Game.
372 Captain Crisp, the Man with a Record.
379 Howling Jonathan, the Terror from Headwaters.
387 Dark Durg, the Ishmael of the Hills.
395 Deadly Aim, the Duke of Derringers.
403 The Nameless Sport.
409 Rob Roy Ranch; or, The Imps of Pan Handle.
416 Monte Jim, the Black Sheep of Bismarck.
426 The Ghost Detective; or, The Spy of the Secret Service.
433 Laughing Leo; or, Sam's Dandy Pard.
438 Oklahoma Nick.
443 A Cool Hand; or, Pistol Johnny's Picnic.
450 The Rustler Detective.
458 Dutch Dan, the Pilgrim from Spitzenberg.
466 Old Rough and Ready, the Sage of Sundown.
474 Daddy Dead-Eye, the Despot of Dew Drop.
488 The Thoroughbred Sport.
495 Rattlepate Rob; or, The Roundhead's Reprisal.
504 Solemn Saul, the Sad Man from San Saba.
514 Gabe Gunn, the Grizzly from Ginseng.
527 Dandy Andy, the Diamond Detective.
535 Dandy Dutch, the Decorator from Dead-Lift.
541 Major Magnet, the Man of Nerve; or, The Muck-a-Mucks of Animas.
547 The Buried Detective; or, Saul Sunday's Six Sensations.
555 Grip-Sack Sid, the Sample Sport.

BY LEON LEWIS.

- 428 The Flying Glim; or, The Island Lure.
456 The Demon Steer.
481 The Silent Detective; or, The Bogus Nephew.
484 Captain Ready, the Red Ransomer.

BY JACKSON KNOX—"Old Hawk."

- 386 Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective.
424 Hawk Heron's Deputy.
444 The Magie Detective; or, The Hidden Hand.
451 Griplock, the Rocket Detective.
462 The Circus Detective.
467 Mainwaring, the Salamander.
477 Dead-arm Brandt.
485 Rowlock, the Harbor Detective.
494 The Detective's Spy.
501 Springsteel Steve, the Retired Detective.
509 Old Falcon, the Thunderbolt Detective.
515 Short-Stop Maje, the Diamond Field Detective.
536 Old Falcon's Foe; or, The Matchless Detective's Swell Job.
548 Falconbridge, the Sphinx Detective.
561 The Thug King; or, The Falcon Detective's Invisible Foe.

BY BUFFALO BILL (Hon. W. F. Cody).

- 53 Death-Trailer, the Chief of Scouts.
83 Gold Bullet Sport; or, Knights of the Overland.
243 The Pilgrim Sharp; or, The Soldier's Sweetheart.
304 Texas Jack, the Prairie Rattler.
319 Wild Bill, the Whirlwind of the West.
394 White Beaver, the Exile of the Platte.
397 The Wizard Brothers; or, White Beaver's Trail.
401 One-Armed Pard; or, Borderland Retribution.
414 Red Renard, the Indian Detective.

BY PHILIP S. WARNE.

- 1 A Hard Crowd; or, Gentleman Sam's Sister.
4 The Kidnapper; or, The Northwest Shanghai.
29 Tiger Dick, Faro King; or, The Cashier's Crime.
54 Always on Hand; or, The Foot-Hills Sport.
80 A Man of Nerve; or, Caliban the Dwarf.
114 The Gentleman from Pike.
171 Tiger Dick, the Man of the Iron Heart.
207 Old Hard Head; or, Whirlwind and his Mare.
251 Tiger Dick vs. Iron Despard.
280 Tiger Dick's Lone Hand.
299 Three of a Kind; or, Tiger Dick, Iron Despard and the Sportive Tiger.
338 Jack Sands, the Boss of the Town.
359 Yellow Jack, the Mestizo.
380 Tiger Dick's Pledge; or, The Golden Serpent.
404 Silver Sid; or, A "Daisy" Bluff.
431 California Kit, the Always on Hand.
472 Six Foot Si; or, The Man to "Tie To."
502 Bareback Buck, the Centaur of the Plains.
522 The Champion Three.
544 The Back to Back Pards.

LATEST AND NEW ISSUES.

- 562 Lone Hand, the Shadow; or, The Master of the Triangle Ranch. By Albert W. Aiken.
563 Wyoming Zeke, the Hotspur of Honeysuckle; or, Old Humility's Hard Road to Travel. By Wm. H. Manning.
564 The Grip-Sack Sharp; or, The Seraphs of Sodom. By Jos. E. Badger, Jr.
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